H. GRANVILLE-BARKER

The Madras House

Revised 1925

SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.

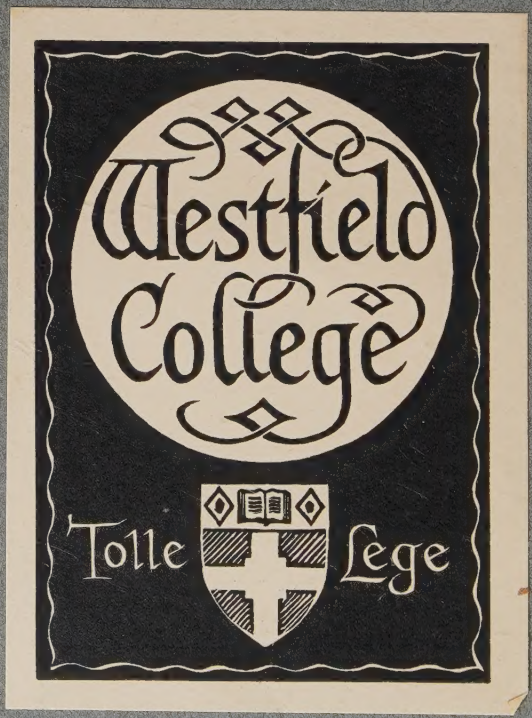
WESTFIELD COLLEGE
LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Westfield College Library

Author Barker, H.G.

Class No. PR 6003.A68

Accession No. 34890



QMW LIBRARY
23 0933409 8

THE MADRAS HOUSE

WITHDRAWN
FROM STOCK
QMUL LIBRARY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THREE PLAYS *BY GRANVILLE BARKER*: 'The Marrying of Ann Leete', 'The Voysey Inheritance', and 'Waste'. In one Vol., 7s. 6d. net; singly, cloth, 3s. 6d. net; paper wrappers, 2s. 6d. net. [*Fourth Impression.*

ROCOCO: VOTE BY BALLOT: FAREWELL TO THE THEATRE. Three One-Act Plays. 3s. 6d. net; also singly, 1s. net each.

FROM ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

ANATOL: A SEQUENCE OF DIALOGUES. By ARTHUR SCHNITZLER. Paraphrased for the English Stage by GRANVILLE BARKER. Crown 8vo, cloth, 3s. 6d. net; paper wrappers, 2s. 6d. net. [*Fourth Impression.*

WITH LAURENCE HOUSMAN

PRUNELLA; OR, LOVE IN A DUTCH GARDEN. By LAURENCE HOUSMAN and GRANVILLE BARKER. With a frontispiece designed by LAURENCE HOUSMAN. Fcap. 4to, designed cover, 6s. net. Theatre Edition, Crown 8vo, wrappers, 2s. 6d. net. [*Twelfth Impression.*

WITH DION CLAYTON CALTHROP

THE HARLEQUINADE: With a frontispiece and decorated initials by LEWIS BAUMER. Fcap. 4to, 6s. net.

THE MADRAS HOUSE: A COMEDY, IN FOUR ACTS, BY HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER

LONDON: SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD.
44 MUSEUM STREET. MCMXXVI.

Entered at the Library of Congress, Washington, U.S.A.
All rights reserved.

First Edition
First Impression, January 4, 1911
Second Impression, January 21, 1911
Third Impression, March 20, 1911
Fourth Impression, February 1, 1916
Fifth Impression, February 1, 1922

Revised Edition
First issued, November 1925
Reprinted February 1926

The Madras House

A COMEDY

Written 1909.

Revised 1925.

" The Madras House " was produced at the Duke of York's Theatre (Mr. Charles Frohman's Repertory Theatre) on the evening of March 9th, 1910.

Henry Huxtable	*E. W. Garden*
Katherine Huxtable	*Miss Florence Haydon*
Laura Huxtable	*Miss Ada Marius*
Minnie Huxtable	*Miss Elizabeth Chesney*
Clara Huxtable	*Miss Joy Chatwyn*
Julia Huxtable	*Miss Victoria Addison*
Emma Huxtable	*Miss Sybil Thorndike*
Jane Huxtable	*Miss Nell Carter*
Major Hippisly Thomas	*Charles Bryant*
Philip Madras	*Dennis Eadie*
Jessica Madras	*Miss Fay Davis*
Constantine Madras	*Sydney Valentine*
Amelia Madras	*Miss May Whitty*
Eustace Perrin State	*Arthur Whitby*
Marion Yates	*Miss Mary Jerrold*
Mr. Brigstock	*Lewis Casson*
Mrs. Brigstock	*Miss Mary Barton*
Miss Chancellor	*Miss Geraldine Olliffe*
Mr. Windlesham	*Charles Maude*
Mr. Belhaven	*Donald Calthrop*
Three Mannequins	*Miss Asta Fleming* *Miss Mair Vaughan* *Miss Mary Brenda*
A Maid at Denmark Hill	*Miss Millie Emden*
A Maid at Phillimore Gardens	*Miss Evangeline Hilliard*

THE MADRAS HOUSE

ACT I

The HUXTABLES *live at Denmark Hill, for* MR. HUXTABLE *is the surviving partner in the well-known Peckham drapery establishment of Roberts & Huxtable, and the situation besides being salubrious is therefore convenient. It is a new house;* MR. HUXTABLE *bought it half finished so that the interior might be to his liking; its exterior the builder said one might describe as of a Free Queen Anne Treatment; to which* MR. HUXTABLE *rejoined, after blinking at the red brick spotted with stone ornament, that After all it was inside they were going to live, you know.*

Through the stained, grained front door, rattling with coloured glass, one reaches the hall, needlessly narrow, needlessly dark, but with its black and white tessellated pavement making for cleanliness. On the left is the stained and grained staircase with its Brussels carpet and twisted brass stair-rods, on the right the drawing-room. The drawing-room can hardly be said to express the personality of MR. HUXTABLE. *The foundations of its furnishing are in the taste of* MRS. HUXTABLE. *For fifteen years or so additions to this family museum have been disputed into their place by the six* MISS HUXTABLES: LAURA (*aged thirty-nine*), MINNIE, CLARA, JULIA, EMMA, JANE (*aged twenty-six*). *The rosewood cabinets, the picture from some Academy of the early Seventies entitled In Ye Olden Time (this was a wedding present most likely), the gilt clock, which is a Shakespeare, narrow-headed, but with a masterly pair of legs, propped pensively against a dial and*

enshrined beneath a dome of glass, another wedding present. These were the treasures of MRS. HUXTABLE'S *first drawing-room, her solace in the dull post-honeymoon days. She was the daughter of a city merchant, wholesale as against her husband's retail; but even in the Seventies retail was lifting its head. It was considered though that* KATHERINE TOMBS *conferred some distinction upon young* HARRY HUXTABLE *by marrying him, and even now, as a portly lady nearing sixty, she figures by the rustle of her dress, the measure of her mellow voice with its carefully chosen phrases, for the dignity of the household.*

The difference between one MISS HUXTABLE *and another is to a casual eye the difference between one lead pencil and another, as these lie upon one's table after some weeks' use; a matter of length, of sharpening, of wear.* LAURA'S *distinction lies in her being the housekeeper; it is a solid power, that of ordering the dinner. She is very silent. While her sisters are silent with strangers, she is silent with her sisters. She doesn't seem to read much either; one hopes she dreams, if only of wild adventures with a new carpet-sweeper. When there was some family bitterness as to whether the fireplace in summer should hold ferns or a Chinese umbrella, it was* LAURA'S *opinion that an umbrella gathers less dust, which carried the day.* MINNIE *and* CLARA *are inclined to religion; not sentimentally; works are a good second with them to faith. They have veered, though, lately, from district visiting to an interest in Missions—missions to Poplar or China (one is almost as far as the other); good works, the results of which they cannot see. Happily they forbear to ask why this proves the more soul-satisfying sort.*

JULIA *started life—that is to say, left school—as a genius.*

The headmistress had had two or three years of such dull girls that really she could not resist this excitement. Water-colour sketches were the medium. So JULIA *was dressed in brown velveteen and sent to an art school, where they wouldn't let her do water-colour drawing at all. And in two years she learnt enough about the trade of an artist not ever to want to do those water-colour drawings again.* JULIA *is now over thirty and very unhappy. Three of her water-colours (early masterpieces) hang on the drawing-room wall. They shame her, but her mother won't have them taken down. On a holiday she'll be off now and then for a solitary day's sketching, and as she tears up the vain attempt to put on paper the things she has learnt to see, she sometimes cries. It was* JULIA, EMMA *and* JANE *who, some years ago, conspired to present their mother with that intensely conspicuous cosy corner. A cosy corner is apparently a device for making a corner just what the very nature of a corner should forbid it to be. They beggared themselves; but one wishes that* MR. HUXTABLE *were more lavish with his dress allowances, then they might at least have afforded something not quite so hideous.*

EMMA, *having* JULIA *in mind, has run rather to coats and skirts and common sense. She would have been a success in an office and worth perhaps thirty shillings a week. But the* HUXTABLES *don't want another thirty shillings a week and this gift, such as it is, has been wasted, so that* EMMA *runs also to a brusque temper.*

JANE *is meekly enough a little wild.* MRS. HUXTABLE'S *power of applying the brake of good breeding, strong enough over five daughters, waned at the sixth attempt in twelve years, and* JANE *has actually got herself proposed to twice by not quite desirable*

young men. Now the fact that she was old enough to be proposed to at all came as something of a shock to the family. Birthdays pass, their celebration growing less emphatic. No one likes to believe that the years are passing; even the birthday's owner, least able to escape its significance, laughs and then changes the subject. So the MISS HUXTABLES *never openly asked each other what the marriage of the youngest of them might imply; perhaps they never even asked themselves. Besides,* JANE *didn't marry. But if she does, unless perhaps she runs away to do it, there will be heart-searchings at least.* MR. HUXTABLE *asked though, and* MRS. HUXTABLE'S *answer—given early one morning before the hot water came—scarcely satisfied him. "For," said* MR. HUXTABLE, *"if the girls don't marry some day what are they to do? It's not as if they had to go into the shop." "No, thank Heaven!" said* MRS. HUXTABLE.

Since his illness MR. HUXTABLE *has taken to asking questions—of anybody and about anything; of himself oftenest of all. But for that illness he would have been a conventional enough type of successful shopkeeper, coarsely fed, whiskered, podgy. But eighteen months' nursing and dieting and removal from the world seem to have brought a gentleness to his voice, a spark of humour to his eye, a childishness to his little bursts of temper—they have added, in fact, a wistfulness which makes him rather a lovable old buffer on the whole.*

This is a Sunday morning, a bright day in October. The family are still at church and the drawing-room is empty. The door opens and the parlour-maid—much becapped and aproned—shows in PHILIP MADRAS *and his friend* MAJOR HIPPISLY THOMAS. THOMAS, *long-legged and deliberate, moves across*

the room to the big French windows which open on to a balcony and look down on the garden and to many gardens beyond. THOMAS *is a good fellow.*

PHILIP MADRAS *is more complex than that. To begin with, it is obvious he is not wholly English. A certain litheness of figure, the keenness and colour of his voice, and a liking for metaphysical turns of speech show an Eastern origin perhaps. He is kind in manner but rather cold, capable of that least English of dispositions—intellectual passion. He is about forty, a year or two younger than his friend. The parlour-maid has secured* MAJOR THOMAS'S *hat and stands clutching it. As* PHILIP *passes her into the room he asks . . .*

PHILIP. About how long ?

THE MAID. In just a few minutes now, I should say, sir. Oh, I beg pardon, does it appen to be the third Sunday in the month ?

PHILIP. I don't know. Does it, Tommy ?

THOMAS. [*from the window.*] I can tell you. [*And he vaguely fishes for his diary.*]

THE MAID. I don't think it does, sir. Because then some of them stop for the Oly Communion and that may make them late for dinner, but I don't think it is, sir.

She backs through the door, entangling the hat in the handle.

PHILIP. Is my mother still staying here ?

THE MAID. Mrs. Madras, sir. Yes, sir.

Then having disentangled the hat, the parlour-maid vanishes. PHILIP *thereupon plunges swiftly into what must be an interrupted argument.*

PHILIP. Very well then, my dear Tommy . . . what are the two master tests of a man's character ? His attitude towards money and his attitude towards women.

THOMAS. By all means stand for the L.C.C. if you can afford it. . . .

PHILIP. Can any decent man walk from Dorset Square to Denmark Hill with his eyes open on a Sunday morning and not beg me on his knees to stand for the County Council?

THOMAS. But you've got what I call the Reformer's mind . . . and got it badly, Phil. Not that you'll make this country any different by making it tidier, you know.

PHILIP. I'm very interested in England, Tommy.

THOMAS. So am I . . . even if I don't talk quite so much about it . . . even if I've had to chuck the army, to earn bread and treacle for a wife and a family . . . which ain't a bad thing for me either. What good will it do you, though, to chuck a thousand a year and a directorship if State wants you to keep 'em?

PHILIP. The Madras House is Woman Incarnate and I loathe it. Your Mr. State may buy the place and do whatever he likes with it.

THOMAS. You're sick of the dress-making business. Right! But you'd think a lot clearer, Phil, if you didn't spell everything with a capital letter.

PHILIP. Tommy, that is a sound observation. I like a good talk with you. Sooner or later you always say one sensible thing.

THOMAS. Thank you.

JULIA *and* LAURA *arrive. They are the first from Church. Sunday frocks, Sunday hats, best gloves, umbrellas and prayer books.*

JULIA. Oh, what a surprise!

PHILIP. We walked over. Ah, you don't know . . . Major Hippisly Thomas . . . my cousin, Miss Julia Huxtable . . . and Miss Huxtable.

JULIA. How do you do?

THOMAS. How do you do?

LAURA. How do you do ?

JULIA. Have you come to see Aunt Amy ?

PHILIP. No, your father.

JULIA. He's walking back with her. So they'll be last, I'm afraid.

LAURA. Will you stay to dinner ?

PHILIP. No, I think not.

LAURA. I'd better tell them. They'll be laying for you.

LAURA *goes out, decorously avoiding a collision with* EMMA, *who, panoplied as the others, comes in at the same moment.*

PHILIP. Hullo, Emma !

EMMA. Well, what a surprise !

PHILIP. You don't know . . . Major Hippisly Thomas . . . Miss Emma Huxtable.

THOMAS. How do you do ?

EMMA. How do you do ? Will you stay to dinner ?

PHILIP. No, we can't. [*That formula again completed, he varies his explanation.*] I've just brought Thomas a Sunday morning walk to help me tell Uncle Henry a bit of news. My father will be back again in England to-morrow.

EMMA. [*with a round mouth.*] Oh !

JULIA. It's a beautiful morning for a walk, isn't it ?

THOMAS. Wonderful for October.

These two look first at each other, and then out of the window. EMMA *gazes quizzically* at PHILIP.

EMMA. I think he knows.

PHILIP. He sort of knows.

EMMA. Why are you being odd, Philip ?

PHILIP *is more hail-fellow-well-met with* EMMA *than with the others.*

PHILIP. Emma . . . I have enticed a comparative stranger to be present so that your father and mother cannot in decency begin to fight the family battle over

again with me. Very cunning, but we did want a walk. And there's the meeting to-morrow. . . .

JANE *peeps through the door.*

JANE. You? Mother!

She has turned to the hall, and from the hall comes MRS. HUXTABLE'S *rotund voice,* "*Yes, Jane?*"

JANE. Cousin Philip!

MRS. HUXTABLE *sails in and superbly compresses every family greeting into one.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. What a surprise! Will you stay to dinner?

EMMA. [*alive to a certain redundancy.*] No, Mother, they can't.

PHILIP. May I introduce my friend . . . Major Hippisly Thomas . . . my aunt, Mrs. Huxtable.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*stately and gracious.*] How do you do, Major Thomas?

PHILIP. Thomas is Mr. Eustace State's London manager.

THOMAS. How do you do?

MRS. HUXTABLE *takes an armchair with the air of one mounting a throne, and from that vantage point begins polite conversation. Her daughters distribute themselves, so do* PHILIP *and* HIPPISLY THOMAS.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Not in the Army, then, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. I was in the Army.

EMMA. Jessica quite well, Philip?

PHILIP. Yes, thanks.

EMMA. And Mildred?

PHILIP. I think so. She's back at school.

MRS. HUXTABLE. A wonderfully warm autumn, is it not?

THOMAS. Quite.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Do you know Denmark Hill well?

THOMAS. Not well.

MRS. HUXTABLE. We have always lived here. I consider it healthy. But London is a healthy place, I think. Oh, I beg your pardon . . . my daughter Jane.

JANE. How do you do?

They shake hands with ceremony. EMMA, *in a mind to liven things up, goes to the window.*

EMMA. We've quite a good garden, that's one thing.

THOMAS. [*not wholly innocent of an attempt to escape from his hostess, makes for the window too.*] I noticed it. I am keen on gardens.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*her attention distracted by* JULIA'S *making for the door.*] Julia, where are you going?

JULIA. To take my things off, Mother.

JULIA *departs. When they were quite little girls* MRS. HUXTABLE *always did ask her daughters where they were going when they left the room and where they had been when they entered it, and she has never dropped the habit. They resent it only by the extreme patience of their replies.*

EMMA. [*entertainingly.*] That's the Crystal Palace.

THOMAS. Is it?

They both peer appreciatively at that famous landmark. In the Crystal Palace and the sunset the inhabitants of Denmark Hill have acquired almost proprietary interest. Then MRS. HUXTABLE *speaks to her nephew with a sudden severity.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Philip, I don't consider your mother's health is at all the thing!

PHILIP. [*amicably.*] It never is, Aunt Kate.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*admitting the justice of the retort.*] That's true.

PHILIP. Uncle Henry keeps better, I think.

MRS. HUXTABLE. He's well enough now. I have had a slight cold. Is it true that your father may appear in England again?

PHILIP. Yes, he has only been on the Continent, doing cures. He arrives to-morrow.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I'm sorry.

JANE. Mother !

MRS. HUXTABLE has launched this with such redoubled severity that JANE *had to protest. However, at this moment arrives* MR. HUXTABLE *himself ; one glad smile.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Ah, Phil . . . I ad an idea you might come over. You'll stay to dinner. Jane, tell your aunt . . . she's taking er bonnet off.

JANE obeys. He sights on the balcony MAJOR THOMAS'S *back.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Who's that outside ?

PHILIP. Hippisly Thomas. We wanted a walk ; we can't stay.

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Have you come on business ?

PHILIP. Well . . .

MRS. HUXTABLE. On Sunday ?

PHILIP. Not exactly.

She shakes her head, gravely deprecating. THOMAS *comes from the balcony.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Ow are you ?

THOMAS. How are you ?

MR. HUXTABLE. Fine morning, isn't it ? Nice prospect this . . . see the Crystal Palace ?

While THOMAS *turns with perfect politeness to view again this phenomenon,* PHILIP *pacifies his aunt.*

PHILIP. You see, Aunt Katherine, to-morrow afternoon we definitely confer with this Mr. State about his buying up the two firms, and my father is passing through England again to attend.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Of course, Philip, if it's business I know nothing about it. But is it suggested that your uncle should attend too ?

Her voice has found a new gravity. PHILIP *becomes very airy; so does* MR. HUXTABLE, *who comes back to rejoin the conversation.*

PHILIP. My dear aunt, naturally.

MR. HUXTABLE. What's this?

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*the one word expressing volumes.*] Constantine.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*with elaborate innocence.*] That's definite now, is it?

MRS. HUXTABLE. You dropped a hint last night, Henry.

MR. HUXTABLE. I dessay. I dessay I did. [*His eye shifts guiltily.*]

MRS. HUXTABLE. Quite out of the question, I should say.

JANE *comes back.*

JANE. Aunt Mary's coming.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*genial again.*] Oh. My daughter Jane . . . Major Thomas, Major Hippisly Thomas.

JANE. [*with discretion.*] Yes, Father.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*tactfully.*] You are naturally not aware, Major Thomas, that for family reasons into which we need not go, Mr. Huxtable has not spoken to his brother-in-law for a number of years.

PHILIP'S *eye meets* THOMAS'S *in comic agony. But* MR. HUXTABLE *too plunges delightedly into the forbidden subject.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Thirty years very near. Wonderful, isn't it? Interested in the same business. Wasn't easy to keep it up.

THOMAS. I had heard.

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh yes, notorious.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*in reprobation.*] And well it may be, Henry.

MRS. MADRAS *comes in. It is evident that* PHILIP *is his father's son. He would seem so wholly, but for that touch of "self-worship which is often self-*

mistrust"; his mother's gift, appearing nowadays less lovably in her as a sort of querulous assertion of her rights and wrongs against the troubles which have been too strong for her. She is a pale old lady, shrunk a little, the life gone out of her.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*some severity remaining.*] Amy, your husband is in England again.

PHILIP *presents a filial cheek. It is kissed.*

PHILIP. How are you, Mother?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*sotto voce.*] Oh, tact, Katherine, tact!

PHILIP. Perhaps you remember Reggie Thomas?

THOMAS. I was at Marlborough with Philip, Mrs. Madras.

MRS. MADRAS. Yes. Is he, Katherine?

Having given THOMAS *a limp hand and her sister this coldest of responses, she finds her way to a sofa, where she sits silent, thinking to herself.* MRS. HUXTABLE *keeps majestic hold upon her subject.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. I am unable to see, Philip, why your uncle should break through his rule now.

MR. HUXTABLE. There you are, Phil!

PHILIP. Of course it is for Uncle Henry to decide.

MR. HUXTABLE. Naturally . . . naturally. [*Still he has an appealing eye on* PHILIP, *who obliges him.*]

PHILIP. But since Mr. State's offer may not be only for the Madras House but for Roberts & Huxtable into the bargain . . . if the two principal proprietors can't meet him round a table to settle the matter . . .

THOMAS. [*ponderously diplomatic.*] Yes . . . a little awkward . . . if I may say so . . . as Mr. State's representative, Mrs. Huxtable.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Do you think, Major Thomas, that awkwardness should make us overlook wicked conduct?

This reduces the assembly to such a shamed silence that poor MR. HUXTABLE *can only add—*

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, talk of something else . . . talk of something else.

After a moment MRS. MADRAS'S *pale voice steals in, as she turns to her son.*

MRS. MADRAS. When did you hear from your father?

PHILIP. A letter from Marienbad two or three days ago and a telegram yesterday morning.

MRS. HUXTABLE, *with a hostess's authority, now restores a polite and easy tone to the conversation.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. And have you left the Army long, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. Four years.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Now what made you take to the Drapery Trade?

PHILIP. [*very explanatory.*] Mr. State is an American financier, Aunt Kitty, who bought up Burrow's, the big mantle place in the city, three years ago, and now wants to buy us up too.

MRS. HUXTABLE. We are not in difficulties, I hope.

PHILIP. Oh, no.

MRS. HUXTABLE. No. No doubt Henry would have told me if we had been.

As she thus gracefully dismisses the subject there appear up the steps and along the balcony the last arrivals from Church, MINNIE *and* CLARA. *The male part of the company unsettles itself.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Ullo! Where have you been?

MINNIE. We went for a walk.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*in apparently deep surprise.*] A walk, Minnie! Where to?

MINNIE. Just the long way home. We thought we'd have time.

CLARA. Did you notice what a short sermon?

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, may I . . . My daughter Clara . . . Major Ippisly Thomas. My daughter Minnie . . . Major Thomas.

The conventional chant begins.

MINNIE. How d' you do ?

THOMAS. How d' you do ?

CLARA. How d' you do ?

MINNIE. How d' you do, Philip ?

PHILIP. How d' you do ?

CLARA. How d' you do ?

PHILIP. How d' you do ?

The chant over, the company re-settles ; MR. HUXTABLE *buttonholing* PHILIP *in the process with an air of some mystery.*

MR. HUXTABLE. By the way, Phil, remind me to ask you something before you go . . . rather important.

PHILIP. I shall be at your place in the morning. Thomas is coming to go through some figures.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*with a regular snap.*] Yes . . . I shan't.

PHILIP. The State meeting is in Bond Street, three o'clock.

MR. HUXTABLE. I know, I know. [*Then, finding himself prominent, he captures the conversation.*] I'm slacking off, Major Thomas, slacking off. Ever since I was ill I've been slacking off.

MRS. HUXTABLE. You are perfectly well again now, Henry.

MR. HUXTABLE. Not the point. I want leisure, you know, leisure. Time for reading . . . time to think a bit.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Nonsense ! [*She adds, with correctness*] Major Thomas will excuse me.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*on his hobby.*] Oh, well . . . a man must . . . some portion of his life. . .

THOMAS. Quite. I got most of my reading done early.

MRS. HUXTABLE. The natural time for it.

MR. HUXTABLE. Ah, lucky feller ! Educated, I suppose. Well, I wasn't. I've been getting the books for years—good editions. I'd like you to see my library.

But these geniuses want settling down to . . . if a man's to keep pace with the thought of the world, y' know. Macaulay, Erbert Spencer, Grote's Istory of Greece! I've got em all there.

He finds no further response; MRS. HUXTABLE *fills the gap.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. I thought the sermon dull this morning, Amy, didn't you?

MRS. MADRAS. [*unexpectedly.*] No, I didn't.

MINNIE. [*to do her share of the entertaining.*] Mother, somebody ought to speak about those boys . . . it's disgraceful. Mr. Vivian had actually to turn round from the organ at them during the last hymn.

JULIA, *her things taken off, reappears.* MR. HUXTABLE *is on the spot.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Ah, my daughter Julia . . . Major—

JULIA. We've been introduced, Father.

She says this with a hauteur which really is pure nervousness, but MR. HUXTABLE *is sufficiently crushed.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, I beg pardon.

But MRS. HUXTABLE *disapproves of any self-assertion and descends upon the culprit; who is for some obscure reason (or for none) more often disapproved of than the others.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Close the door, please, Julia.

JULIA. I'm sorry, Mother.

PHILIP *closes the offending door.* JULIA *obliterates herself in a chair, and the conversation, hardly encouraged by this little affray, comes to an intolerable standstill. At last* CLARA *makes an effort.*

CLARA. Is Jessica quite well, Philip?

PHILIP. Yes, thank you, Clara.

MRS. HUXTABLE. And dear little Mildred?

PHILIP. Yes, thank you, Aunt Kate.

Further standstill. Then MINNIE *contrives a remark.*

MINNIE. Do you still like that school for her?

PHILIP. [*with finesse.*] It seems to provide every accomplishment that money can buy.

MRS. HUXTABLE *discovers a sure opening.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Have you been away for the summer, Major Thomas ?

THOMAS. [*vaguely—he is getting sympathetically tongue-tied.*] Oh . . . yes . . .

PHILIP. Tommy and Jessica and I took a holiday motoring round Munich and into it for the operas.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Was that pleasant ?

PHILIP. Very.

MRS. HUXTABLE. And where was dear Mildred ?

PHILIP. With her aunt most of the time . . . Jessica's sister-in-law, you know.

MINNIE. Lady Ames ?

PHILIP. Yes.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*innocently snobbish.*] Very nice for her.

MR. HUXTABLE. We take a ouse at Weymouth as a rule.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Do you know Weymouth, Major Thomas ?

THOMAS. No, I don't.

MRS. HUXTABLE. George III. used to stay there, but that is a hotel now.

MR. HUXTABLE. Keep your spare money in the country, y' know.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Oh, and there is everything one wants at Weymouth.

But even this subject flags.

MRS. HUXTABLE. You think more of Bognor, Amy, I know.

MRS. MADRAS. Only to live in, Katherine.

They have made their last effort. The conversation is dead. MR. HUXTABLE'S *discomfort suddenly becomes physical.*

MR. HUXTABLE. I'm going to change my coat.

PHILIP. I think perhaps we ought to be off.

MR. HUXTABLE. No, no, no, no, no, I shan't be a minute. Don't go, Phil; there's a good fellow.

And he has left them all to it. The HUXTABLE *conversation, it will be noticed, consists mainly of asking questions. Visitors after a time fall into the habit too.*

PHILIP. Do you like this house better than the old one, Clara?

CLARA. It has more rooms, you know.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Do you live in London, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. No, I live at Woking. I come up and down every day as a rule. I think the country's better for the children.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Not a cheerful place, is it?

THOMAS. Oh, very cheerful!

MRS. HUXTABLE. I had thought not for some reason.

EMMA. The cemetery, Mother.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*accepting the suggestion with dignity.*] Perhaps.

CLARA. And of course there's a much larger garden. We have the garden of the next house as well.

JANE. Not all the garden of the next house.

CLARA. Well, most of it.

This stimulating difference of opinion takes them to the balcony. PHILIP *follows.* JULIA *follows* PHILIP. MINNIE *departs to take her things off.*

JULIA. Do you notice how near the Crystal Palace seems? That means rain.

PHILIP. Of course . . . you can see the Crystal Palace.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Julia, won't you catch cold on the balcony without a hat?

JULIA. [*meek, but before the visitor, determined.*] I don't think so, Mother.

MRS. HUXTABLE *turns, with added politeness, to* MAJOR THOMAS.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Yes, we used to live not so far along the hill ; it certainly was a smaller house.

PHILIP *is now on the balcony receiving more information.*

PHILIP. That's Ruskin's house, is it ? Yes, I see the chimney pots.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I should not have moved, myself, but I was overruled.

EMMA. Mother, we had grown out of Hollybank.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I was overruled. Things are done on a larger scale than they used to be. Not that I approve of that.

THOMAS. One's family will grow up.

MRS. HUXTABLE. People spend their money nowadays. My father's practice was to live on half his income. However, he lost the greater part of his money by unwise investments . . . in lead, I think it was. I was at school at the time in Brighton. And he educated me above my station in life.

At this moment CLARA *breaks out of the conservatory. Something has happened.*

CLARA. Jane, that Cineraria's out.

JANE. Oh !

They crowd in to see it. PHILIP *crowds in too.* MRS. HUXTABLE *is unmoved.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. We are told that riches are a snare, Major Thomas.

THOMAS. It is one I've always found easy to avoid.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*oblivious of the joke, which indeed she would not have expected on such a subject.*] And I have noticed that their acquisition seldom improves the character of people in my station of life. I am of course ignorant of my husband's affairs . . . that is to say, I keep myself as ignorant as possible . . . but I

think we should not try to be anything but what we are.

THOMAS. [*forestalling a yawn.*] Quite so.

MRS. HUXTABLE *takes a breath.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. And with a family of daughters, Major Thomas. . . .

EMMA. [*a little agonised.*] Mother!

MRS. HUXTABLE. What is it, Emma?

But EMMA *thinks better of it and goes to join the Cineraria party, saying—*

EMMA. Nothing, Mother, I beg your pardon.

MRS. HUXTABLE *retakes her breath.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. What were we saying?

THOMAS. [*with resigned politeness.*] A family of daughters.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Yes. You fought in the war, I suppose?

The inexplicable but characteristic suddenness of this rouses the MAJOR *a little.*

THOMAS. I was in it. I just missed South Africa.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Still I find people look differently at life nowadays. A man no longer seems prepared to marry and support a wife and family by his unaided exertions. I consider that a pity.

THOMAS. [*near another yawn.*] Quite . . . quite so.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I have always determined that my daughters should be sought after for themselves alone. That should ensure their happiness. Any eligible gentleman who visits here constantly is given to understand, delicately, that little need be expected from Mr. Huxtable beyond his approval. You a r e married, I think you said, Major Thomas.

This quite wakes him up, though MRS. HUXTABLE *is really innocent of the implication.*

THOMAS. Yes, oh, dear me, yes.

MRS. HUXTABLE. And a family?

THOMAS. Four children . . . my youngest is three.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Pretty dear!

THOMAS. No, ugly little beggar, but has character.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I must take off my things before dinner. You'll excuse me. If one is not punctual oneself. . . .

THOMAS. Quite.

MRS. HUXTABLE. We cannot induce you to join us?

THOMAS. Many thanks, but we have to meet Mrs. Phil for lunch in town at two.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I am sorry.

THOMAS *opens the door for her with his best bow and she graciously departs, conscious of having properly impressed him.* CLARA, *who has now her things to take off, crosses the room, saying to* PHILIP, *who follows her from the balcony—*

CLARA. Yes, I'll tell father, Philip. I'm going upstairs.

THOMAS *opens the door for her, but only with his second best bow, and then turns to* PHILIP *with a sigh.*

THOMAS. Phil, we ought to be going.

PHILIP. Wait till we've seen my uncle again.

THOMAS. All right.

He heaves another sigh and sits down. All this time there has been MRS. MADRAS *upon her sofa, silent, as forgotten as any other piece of furniture for which there is no immediate use.* PHILIP *now goes to her. When she does speak it is unresponsively.*

PHILIP. How long do you stay in town, Mother?

MRS. MADRAS. I have been here a fortnight. I generally stay three weeks.

PHILIP. Jessica has been meaning to ask you to Dorset Square again.

MRS. MADRAS. Has she?

PHILIP. [*a little guiltily.*] She's very busy just now . . . with one thing and another.

Suddenly MRS. MADRAS *rouses herself.*

MRS. MADRAS. I wish to see your father, Philip.

PHILIP. [*in doubt.*] He won't be here long, Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. No, I am sure he won't.

With three delicate strides THOMAS *lands himself on to the balcony.*

PHILIP. Well, I'll tell him you want to see him.

MRS. MADRAS. Please don't. Tell him I think he ought to come and see me.

PHILIP. He won't, Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. I know he won't. He came to England in May, didn't he? He was here till July, wasn't he? Did he so much as send me a message?

PHILIP. [*with unkind patience.*] No, Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. What was he doing all the while, Philip?

PHILIP. I didn't see much of him. I really don't know why he's back again now at all. We could have done this business without him. There's not much to be gained by your seeing him, you know.

MRS. MADRAS. You are very heartless, Philip.

This is true enough for PHILIP *to resent it rather.*

PHILIP. My dear mother, you and he have been separated for . . . how long?

MRS. MADRAS. [*with withered force.*] I am his wife still, I should hope. I have never forgotten my duty. He is an old man now and past such sin, and I am an old woman. And I am ready to be a comfort to his declining years, and it's right I should be allowed to tell him so. And you should not let your wife put you against your own mother, Philip.

PHILIP. [*bewildered.*] Really!

MRS. MADRAS. I know what Jessica thinks of me. Jessica is very clever and has no patience with people who can only do their best to be good . . . I understand that. Well, it isn't her duty to love me . . . at least it may not be her duty to love her husband's

mother, or it may be, I don't say. But it is your duty. I sometimes think, Philip, you don't love me any longer, though you're afraid to say so.

The appeal ends so pathetically that PHILIP *is very gently equivocal.*

PHILIP. If I didn't love you, my dear mother, I should be afraid to say so.

MRS. MADRAS. When are you to see your father?

PHILIP. We've asked him to dinner to-morrow.

At this moment EMMA *comes in with a briskness so jarring to poor* MRS. MADRAS'S *already wrought nerves, that she turns on her.*

MRS. MADRAS. Emma, why do you come bouncing in like that when I'm trying to get a quiet word with Philip?

EMMA. Really, Aunt Amy, the drawing-room belongs to every one.

MRS. MADRAS. I'm sure I don't know why I come and stay here at all. I dislike your mother extremely.

EMMA. Then kindly don't tell me so. I've no wish not to be polite to you.

PHILIP. [*pacifically.*] Emma, I think Uncle Henry ought to attend this meeting to-morrow.

MRS. MADRAS. [*beginning to cry.*] Of course he ought. Who is he to go on like this about Constantine! My handkerchief's upstairs.

EMMA. [*contritely.*] Shall I fetch it for you, Aunt Amy?

MRS. MADRAS. No, I'll be a trouble to no one.

She retires, injured. PHILIP *continues, purposely placid.*

PHILIP. What's more, he really wants to attend it.

EMMA. I'm sorry I was rude . . . but she does get on our nerves, you know.

PHILIP. Why do you invite her?

EMMA. [*quite jolly with him.*] Oh, we're all very fond of Aunt Amy, and anyhow mother would think it our

duty. I don't see how she can enjoy coming though. She never goes out . . . never joins in the conversation . . . just sits nursing herself.

PHILIP. [*quizzically.*] You're all too good, Emma.

EMMA. Yes. I heard you making fun of Julia in the conservatory. But if one stopped doing one's duty what would happen to the world? [*Her voice now takes that tone which is the well-bred substitute for a wink.*] I say . . . I suppose I oughtn't to tell you about Julia, but it is rather a joke. You know Julia gets hysterical when her headaches last too long.

PHILIP. Does she?

EMMA. Well, a collar marked Owen Nares came back from the wash in mistake for one of father's. I don't think he lives near here, but it's one of these big steam laundries. And Morgan the cook got it and she gave it to Julia . . . and Julia kept it. And when mother found out she cried for a whole day. She said it showed a wanton mind.

PHILIP'S *mocking face becomes grave.*

PHILIP. I don't think that's at all amusing, Emma.

EMMA. [*in genuine surprise.*] Don't you?

PHILIP. How old is Julia?

EMMA. She's thirty-four. [*Her face falls too.*] No . . . it is rather dreadful, isn't it? [*Then wrinkling her forehead as at a puzzle.*] It isn't exactly that one wants to get married. I daresay mother is right about that.

PHILIP. About what?

EMMA. Well, some time ago, a gentleman proposed to Jane. And mother said it would have been more honourable if he had spoken to father first, and that Jane was the youngest and too young anyhow to know her own mind. Well, you know, she's twenty-six. And then they heard of something he'd once done and it was put a stop to. And Jane was very rebellious and mother cried. . . .

PHILIP. Does she always cry ?

EMMA. Yes, she does cry if she's upset about us. And I think she was right. One ought not to risk being unhappy for life, ought one ?

PHILIP. Are you all so happy now, then ?

EMMA. Oh, deep down, I think we are. It would be ungrateful not to be. When one has a good home and . . . ! But of course living together and going away together and being together all the time, one does get a little irritable now and then. We sit as mum as maggots when people are here . . . I suppose we're afraid of squabbling.

PHILIP. Do you squabble ?

EMMA. Not like we used. You know till we moved into this house we had only two bedrooms between us, the nursery and the old night nursery. Laura and Minnie have one each now and there's one we take by turns, year and year about. There wasn't a bigger house to be got here or I suppose we could have had it. They hated the idea of moving far. And it's odd, you know, father's afraid of spending money, though he must have got lots. He says if he gave us any more we shouldn't know what to do with it . . . and of course that's true.

PHILIP. But what do you girls do ?

EMMA. We keep busy. There's lots to be done about the house and there's the Parish . . . and of course we've our friends . . . and tennis. Julia used to sketch quite well. D'you think novels and newspapers tell you the truth about things, Philip ?

PHILIP. Some novels may. Why ?

EMMA. Because you'd think from them there wasn't any one else in England like us. But I know lots. You mustn't think I'm grumbling. I talk too much. They tell me so.

PHILIP's *comment is the question, half serious* . . .

PHILIP. Why don't you go away, all six of you, or say five of you ?

EMMA. [*wide-eyed.*] Go away !

PHILIP. [*comprehensively.*] Out of it.

EMMA. [*wider-eyed.*] Where to ?

PHILIP. [*with a sigh—for her.*] Ah, that's just it.

EMMA. How could one ! And it would upset everything so. Father and mother don't know one feels like this at times . . . they would be grieved.

PHILIP *turns to her with kindly irony.*

PHILIP. Emma, they're telling your father at the shop that he'll have to abolish the living-in system. He might as well do it at home for a start.

MR. HUXTABLE *returns, at ease in a jacket. He pats his daughter kindly on the shoulder.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Now run along, Jane . . . I mean Emma . . . I want a word with your cousin.

EMMA. Yes, Father.

EMMA—*or* JANE—*obediently disappears.* PHILIP *then looks sideways at his uncle.*

PHILIP. I've come over, as you asked me.

MR. HUXTABLE. I didn't ask you.

PHILIP. You dropped a hint.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*almost with a blush.*] Did I ? I dessay I did.

PHILIP. But you must hurry up and decide about the meeting to-morrow. Thomas and I have to go.

MR. HUXTABLE. Phil, I suppose you're set on selling.

PHILIP. Quite.

MR. HUXTABLE. You young men ! The Madras Ouse means nothing to you.

PHILIP. [*anti-sentimental.*] Nothing unsaleable.

MR. HUXTABLE. Well, well, well ! [*Then in a furtive fuss.*] Well, just a minute, my boy, before your aunt comes down . . . she's been on at me upstairs . . . I tell you ! Something you must do for me to-morrow,

like a good feller, at the shop in the morning. [*He suddenly becomes portentous.*] Have you heard this yet about Miss Yates ?

PHILIP. No.

MR. HUXTABLE. Disgraceful ! Disgraceful !!

PHILIP. She did very well in Bond Street . . . learnt a good deal. She has only been back a few weeks.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*snorting derisively.*] Learnt a good deal ! [*Then he sights* THOMAS *on the balcony and hails him.*] Oh, come in, Major Thomas. [*And dropping his voice again ominously.*] Shut the window if you don't mind ; we don't want the ladies to hear this.

THOMAS *shuts the window and* MR. HUXTABLE *spreads himself to the awful enjoyment of imparting scandal.*

MR. HUXTABLE. I tell you, my boy, up at your place, got hold of she's been by some feller . . . some West End Club feller, I dessay . . . and he's put her in the . . . well, I tell you !! Major Thomas will excuse me. Not a chit of a girl, mind you, but first hand in our Costume room. Buyer we were going to make her ! Thought we'd get her taught a bit of style ! Style !!

PHILIP *frowns, both at the news and at his uncle's manner of giving it.*

PHILIP. What do you want me to do ?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*more portentous than ever.*] You wait, that's not what's the worst of it. You know Brigstock.

PHILIP. Do I ?

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, yes, third man in the Osiery.

PHILIP. True.

MR. HUXTABLE. Well . . . it seems that more than a week ago Miss Chancellor caught them kissing.

PHILIP. [*his impatience of the display growing.*] Caught who kissing ?

MR. HUXTABLE. I know it ain't clear. Let's go back to the beginning . . . Major Thomas will excuse me.

THOMAS. [*shoving the properest feeling.*] Not at all.

MR. HUXTABLE. Wednesday afternoon, Willoughby, that's our doctor, comes up as usual. Miss Yates goes in to see him. Miss Chancellor—that's our housekeeper, Major Thomas—over'ears something, quite by accident, so she says, and afterwards taxes her with it.

PHILIP. Unwise.

MR. HUXTABLE. No, no, her plain duty . . . she knows my principle about such things. But then she remembers the kissing and that gets about among our young ladies. Somebody stupid there, I grant you, but you know what these things are. And then it gets about about Miss Yates . . . all over the shop. And then it turns out that Brigstock's a married man . . . been married two years . . . secret from us, you know, because he's living in and on promotion and all the rest. And yesterday morning his wife turns up in my office and has hysterics and says her husband's been slandered.

PHILIP. I don't see why Miss Yates should have come to any particular harm at our place. What she does out of hours is her own business, of course. . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. No, it ain't . . . oh no, it ain't! [*Still instinctively spreading himself, but with that wistful look creeping on him now.*] Anyhow . . . I had er up the day before yesterday. And I don't know what's coming over me. I scolded her well. I was in the right in all I said . . . but . . . ! Have you ever suddenly eard your own voice as it might be a gramophone? If she'd only have answered back! But she just sat looking at me . . . and I went funny all over. So I told her to leave the room quick. [*He grows distressed and appealing.*] And you must take the job on, Phil, . . . it ought all to be settled to-morrow. Miss Yates must have the sack and I'm not sure Brigstock

hadn't better have the sack. We don't want to lose Miss Chancellor, but really if she can't hold er tongue at her age . . . well, she'd better have . . .

PHILIP. [*out of patience.*] Oh, nonsense.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*his old unquestioning self asserted for a moment.*] No, I will not have scandals in the shop. We've always been free of em . . . almost always. I don't want to be hard on the girl. If the man is in our employ and you can find im out . . . punish the guilty as well as the innocent . . . I'm for all that. [*That breath exhausted, he continues quite pathetically to* THOMAS.] But I do not know what's coming over me. Before I got ill I'd have tackled this business like winking. But when you're a long time in bed . . . I'd never been ill like that before . . . I dunno how it is . . . you get thinking . . . and things which used to be clear don't seem so clear . . . and then after, when you start to do and say the things that used to come natural . . . they don't come natural . . . and that puts you off something . . .

This is interrupted by the reappearance of MRS. HUXTABLE, *lace-capped and ready for dinner. She is at the pitch to which the upstairs dispute with her husband evidently brought her. It would seem he bolted in the middle of it.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Is it the fact, Philip, that if your uncle does not attend the meeting to-morrow this business transaction with Mr.—I forget his name—the American gentleman . . . and which I of course know nothing about, will be seriously upset ?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*joining battle.*] Kitty, why shouldn't I go ? If Constantine chooses to turn up . . . that is his business. I needn't speak directly to him . . . so to say.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*hurling this choice bolt from her vocabulary.*] A quibble, Henry.

MR. HUXTABLE. If he's really leaving England now for good. . . .

MRS. HUXTABLE. But you do as you wish, of course.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*wistful again.*] I should like you to be convinced.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Don't prevaricate, Henry. And your sister is just coming into the room. We had better drop the subject.

And in MRS. MADRAS *does come, but what with one thing and another* MR. HUXTABLE *is now getting what he would call thoroughly put out.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Now if Amelia here was to propose seeing im—

MRS. HUXTABLE. Henry . . . a little consideration !

MR. HUXTABLE. [*goaded to the truth.*] Well, I want to go, Kitty, and that's all about it. And I dropped a int, I did, to Phil to come over and help me through it with you. I thought he'd make it seem as if it was most pressing business . . . only he hasn't . . . so as to hurt your feelings less. Because I'd been bound to have told you afterwards or it might have slipped out somehow. Goodness gracious me, here's the Madras House, which I've sunk enough money in these last ten years to have paid our Peckham rates and taxes pretty nearly . . . it's to be sold because Phil won't stand by me and his father don't care a straw now. Not but what that's Constantine all over ! Marries you, Amelia, acts like a prince in a fairy tale for eighteen months and then—

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*scandalized "Before visitors too!".*] Henry !

MR. HUXTABLE. All right, all right. And I'm not to attend this meeting, if you please !

The little storm subsides.

MRS. MADRAS. It's to be sold now, is it ?

PHILIP. Yes, Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. [*at her brother.*] It was started with my money as well as yours.

MR. HUXTABLE *is recovering and takes no notice.*

PHILIP. Yes, Mother, we know.

MRS. MADRAS. And if that's all you've lost by Constantine, I don't see you've a right to be so bitter against him.

She is still ignored. MR. HUXTABLE, *quite cheery again, goes on affably.*

MR. HUXTABLE. D'you know, Major Thomas, that thirty years ago when that shop was the talk of London . . . yes, and Paris houses poorparleying for a partnership too . . . why, Duchesses have been known to go to all intents and purposes on their knees to him to design them a dress. Wouldn't do it unless he pleased—not unless he approved their figures and thought they'd do him credit. Ad Society under his thumb.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*from the height of respectability.*] No doubt he knew his business.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*in an ecstasy.*] Knew his business! Knew his business!! And in Society too . . . asked everywhere like one of themselves very nearly! It's my belief that if we'd ad a Prime Minister in those days with a wife who cared a button what she looked like, he could have had a knighthood. And a knighthood was a knighthood then!

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*explicitly.*] He was untrue to his wife, Henry.

At this MR. HUXTABLE *is the moral man again. These sudden changes are so like him. They are genuine; he is just half conscious of their suddenness.*

MR. HUXTABLE. I know, and Amy did what she should have done. You see it wasn't even an ordinary case, Major Thomas. It was girls in the shop. And even though he took em out of the shop . . . that's a

slur on the whole trade. A man in his position . . . you can't overlook that.

MRS. MADRAS. [*palely asserting herself.*] I could have overlooked it if I had chosen.

PHILIP. [*to whom this is all so futile and foolish.*] My dear mother, you were unhappy with my father and you left him . . . the matter is very simple.

MRS. MADRAS. I beg your pardon, Philip . . . I was not unhappy with him.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Amy, how could you be happy with a man who was unfaithful to you? What nonsense!

JANE and JULIA, from the balcony, finding the window locked, tap with their finger-nails upon the pane. The very sharpness of the sound begins to put out MR. HUXTABLE *again.*

MR. HUXTABLE. No, no, they can't come in. [*He mouths at them through the window.*] You can't come in.

JANE mouths back.

MR. HUXTABLE. What? [*Then the sense of it coming to him, he looks at his watch.*] No, it isn't . . . two minutes yet.

And he turns away, having excluded the innocent mind from this unseemly discussion. But at the very moment LAURA *comes in by the door. His patience flies.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, damn! Well, I beg pardon. [*Then in desperate politeness.*] Let me introduce . . . my daughter Laura . . . Major Thomas.

LAURA. [*collectedly.*] We have met, Father.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*giving it all up.*] Well . . . how can I tell . . . there are so many of you!

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*severely.*] Henry, you had better go to this meeting to-morrow.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*wistful for a moment.*] You think I ought?

MRS. HUXTABLE. You know you ought not.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*disputing it manfully.*] No . . . I don't know I ought not. It isn't so easy to know what ought and ought not to be done as you always make out, Kitty. Suppose I just do something wrong for once and see what happens.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Henry, don't say such things.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*very reasonably to* MAJOR THOMAS.] Well, since I've been ill—

But EMMA *and* MINNIE *have come in now, and* JANE *and* JULIA, *finding their exile a little unreasonable, rattle hard at the window.* MR. HUXTABLE *gives it all up again.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, let em in, Phil . . . there's a good feller.

THOMAS. Allow me. [*And he does so.*]

EMMA. [*crisply.*] Oh, what's it all been about?

MRS. HUXTABLE. Never mind, Emma.

She says this to EMMA *as she would have said it to her at the age of four. Meanwhile* MR. HUXTABLE *has recovered.*

MR. HUXTABLE. You know, Major Thomas, Constantine could always get the better of me in little things.

JANE *has sighted* MINNIE *and, callously, across the breadth of the room, imparts a tragedy.*

JANE. Minnie, your frog's dead . . . in the conservatory.

MINNIE *pales.*

MINNIE. Oh, dear.

MR. HUXTABLE. . . . After the difference, of course, I began to write to him as Dear Sir. To this day he'll send me letters beginning Dear Arry.

MINNIE *is hurrying to the glass house of death.*

JANE. We've been burying it.

MR. HUXTABLE. . . . Always at his ease, you know.

THOMAS *escapes from him.* PHILIP *is bending over his mother—a little kindlier.*

PHILIP. I'll try to see you again before you go back to Bognor, Mother.

At this moment the gong rings. A tremendous gong, beloved of the English middle class, which makes any house seem small. A hollow sound: the dinner hour striking its own empty stomach. JANE, *whose things are not taken off, gives a mitigated yelp and dashes for the door, dashes into the returning, tidy* CLARA. MRS. HUXTABLE *shakes a finger.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Late again, Jane.

PHILIP. We'll be off, Aunt Katherine.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*with a common humanity she has not shown before.*] Philip . . . never think I mean to be uncharitable about your father. But he made your mother most unhappy when you were too young to know of it . . . and there is the example to others, isn't there?

PHILIP. Yes . . . of course. I know just how you feel about it . . . I don't much like him either.

PHILIP *must be a little mischievous with his aunt. She responds by returning at once to her own apparent self again.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. My dear boy . . . your own father! *From the balcony one hears the tag of* JULIA's *entertaining of* MAJOR THOMAS. *They have been peering at the horizon.*

JULIA. Yes, it means rain . . . when you see it so clearly.

A general-post of leave-taking now begins.

PHILIP. Well, see you to-morrow, Uncle Henry.

MR. HUXTABLE. Yes, I suppose so. Oh, and about that other matter. . . .

PHILIP. What can I do?

MR. HUXTABLE. I'll telephone you in the morning.

PHILIP. Good-bye, Mother.

THOMAS. Good-bye, Mrs. Huxtable.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*with a final flourish of politeness.*] You will overlook this domestic dissension, I hope, Major Thomas . . . it will happen sometimes.

THOMAS. I've been most interested.

MINNIE *comes back sadly from the frog's grave.*

PHILIP. Good-bye, Clara.

CLARA. Good-bye, Philip.

MR. HUXTABLE. You really won't stay to dinner ?

PHILIP. Good-bye, Laura.

THOMAS. Thanks, no. We meet to-morrow.

The general-post quickens, the chorus grows confused.

LAURA. Good-bye.

THOMAS. Good-bye.

JANE. Good-bye.

THOMAS. Good-bye.

PHILIP. Good-bye, Emma—oh, pardon.

There has been the confusion of crossed hands. Apologies, withdrawals, a treading on toes, more apologies.

EMMA. Good-bye, Major Thomas.

PHILIP. Now good-bye, Emma.

THOMAS. Good-bye, Mrs. Madras.

PHILIP. Good-bye.

THOMAS. Good-bye.

The chorus and the general-post continue, until at last PHILIP *and* THOMAS *escape to a tram and a tube and their lunch, while the* HUXTABLES *sit down in all ceremony to Sunday dinner : roast beef, horse-radish, Yorkshire pudding, brown potatoes, Brussels sprouts, apple tart, custard and cream, Stilton cheese, dessert.*

ACT II

The business offices of Roberts & Huxtable are tucked away upon the first floor somewhere at the back of that large drapery establishment. The waiting-room—the one in which employee sits in shivering preparation for interviews with employer—besides thus having been the silent scene of more misery than most places on earth, is one of the very ugliest rooms that ever entered into the mind of a builder and decorator. Four plain walls of brick or plaster, with seats round them, would have left it a waiting-room pure and simple. But the ugly hand of the money-maker was upon it. In the person of a contractor he thrust upon the unfortunate room—as on all the others—everything that could excuse his price and disguise his profit. The walls, to start with, were distempered an unobjectionable green, but as that might seem too plain and cheap, a dado of a nice stone colour was added, topped with stencilling in dirty red of a pattern that once was Greek.

The fireplace is apparently designed to provide the maximum amount of work possible for the wretched boy who cleans it every morning, retiring from the contest well black-leaded himself. The mantelpiece above—only an expert in such abominations knows what it is made of; but it pretends, with the aid of worm-shaped dashes of paint, to be brown marble. It is too high for comfort, too low for dignity. It has to be dusted, and usually isn't.

The square lines of the two long windows, which look upon some sanitary brick airshaft, have been carefully spoilt by the ovaling of their top panes. The half-glazed door, that opens from the passage, is of the wrong shape; the green baize door, that admits to MR. PHILIP'S *room, is of the wrong colour.*

And then the furnishing! Those yellow chairs upholstered in red cotton goose-flesh plush; that plush-seated, plush-backed bench, placed draughtily between the windows! There is a reasonable office table in the middle of the room. On the walls are, firstly, photographs of ROBERTS *and* HUXTABLE. ROBERTS *was a Welshman and looks it. No prosperous drapery business in London but has its Welshman. There is also a photograph of the premises—actual; and an advertisement sketch of them—ideal. There is a ten-year-old fashion plate: twenty faultless ladies engaged in ladylike occupations or serene in the lack of any. There is an insurance almanac, the one thing of beauty in the room. On the mantelpiece lies a London Directory, the one piece of true colour.*

The hand of the money-maker that has wrenched awry the Greek pattern on the wall has been laid also on all the four people who sit waiting for MR. PHILIP at *noon on this Monday; and to the warping more or less of them all.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *sitting stiffly on the plush bench, in brown quilled hat and coat and skirt, is, one would guess, a clerk of some sort. She lacks colour; she lacks repose; she lacks—one stops to consider that she might possibly be a beautiful woman were it not for the things she lacks. But she is the product of fifteen years or so of long hours and little lunch. Certainly at this moment she is not seen at her best.*

She sits twisting her gloved hands, pulling at a loose thread, now and then biting it. Otherwise she bites her lips; her face is drawn, and she stares in front of her with only a twist of the eye now and then towards her husband, who is uncomfortable upon a chair a few feet away.

If one were asked to size up MR. BRIGSTOCK, *one would say: Nothing against him. The position of Third Man in the Hosiery does not require any special talents, and it doesn't get them; or if it does they don't stay there. And* MR. BRIGSTOCK *stays there—just stays there. It sums him up—sums up millions of him—to say that in their youth they have energy enough to get into a position; afterwards in their terror—or sometimes only because their employers have not the heart to dismiss them—they stay there. Sometimes, though, the employers have the heart and do. And then what happens? Considered as a man rather than a wage earner—not that it is usual for us so to consider him—he is one of those who happily for themselves get married by women whom apparently no other man much wants to marry. Subdued to what he works in, he is dressed as a Third Man in the Hosiery should be. He is, at the moment, as agitated as his wife, and as he has no nervous force to be agitated with, is in a state of greater wretchedness.*

On the other side of the room sits MISS CHANCELLOR. *Every large living-in draper's should have as housekeeper a lady of a certain age, who can embody in her own person the virtues she will expect in the young ladies under her. Decorum, sobriety of thought, tidiness, respect of persons—these are the qualities generally necessary to a shop-assistant's salvation.* MISS CHANCELLOR *radiates them. They are genuine in her, too. She is now planted squarely on her chair,*

as it might be in easy authority, but looking closely, one may see that it is a dignified resentment keeping her there unmovable.

In the middle of the room by the table sits MISS YATES. *While they wait this long time the other three try hard to keep their eyes off her. It isn't easy; partly because she is in the middle of the room and they are not. But anyhow and anywhere* MISS YATES *is a person that you look at, though you may ignorantly wonder why. She is by no means pretty, nor does she try to attract you. But you look at her as you look at a fire or a light in an otherwise empty room. She is not a lady, nor is she well educated, and ten years' shop-assisting has left its mark on her. But there it is. To the seeing eye she glows in that room like a live coal. She has genius—she has life, to however low a use she—or the world for her—may put it. And commoner people are lustreless beside her.*

They wait silently and the tension increases. At last it is slightly relieved by PHILIP'S *arrival. He comes in briskly, his hat on, a number of unopened letters in his hand. They get up to receive him with varying degrees of respect and apprehension.*

PHILIP. Good morning, Miss Chancellor. Good morning, Miss Yates. Good morning, Mr. Brigstock.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*introducing her.*] Mrs. Brigstock.

PHILIP *nods pleasantly to* MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *who purses her lips in a half-frightened, half-vengeful way, and sits down again. Then he puts his hat on the mantelpiece and settles himself in the master position at the table.*

PHILIP. I'm afraid I've kept you waiting. Well, now—

There is a sharp knock at the door.

PHILIP. Come.

It is BELHAVEN. BELHAVEN *is seventeen, perhaps, on the climb from office boy to clerk, of the usual pattern.* PHILIP *greets him pleasantly.*

PHILIP. Oh, good morning, Belhaven.

BELHAVEN. I've put Major Thomas in your room, sir, as the papers were there, but Mr. Huxtable's is empty if you'd like . . .

PHILIP. This'll do.

BELHAVEN. Major Thomas said would you speak to him for a minute when you'd time.

PHILIP. I'll go in now.

BELHAVEN. Thank you, sir.

PHILIP. [*to the waiting four.*] Excuse me one minute, please.

BELHAVEN *bolts back to his outer office by one door —his way of opening and getting through it is a labour-saving invention; and* PHILIP *goes to find* THOMAS *through the other. There is silence again, held by these four at a greater tension than ever. At last* MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *least able to bear it, gives one desperate wriggle-fidget.* BRIGSTOCK *looks at her deprecatingly and says . . .*

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Will you sit here, Freda, if you feel the draught?

MRS BRIGSTOCK. [*just trusting herself to answer.*] No, thank you.

Silence again, but soon broken by PHILIP, *who comes from the other room, throwing over his shoulder the last of his few words with* THOMAS, "*All right, Tommy*". TOMMY, *even at the dullest business, always pleasantly amuses him. Then he settles himself at the table for the second time, conciliatory, kind.*

PHILIP. Well . . . now . . .

MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *determined to be first heard, lets slip the torrent of her wrath.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. It's slander, Mr. Madras, and I request that it shall be retracted immediately . . . before everybody . . . in the public press . . . by advertisement.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*in an agonised whisper.*] Oh, Freda . . . not so eadstrong.

PHILIP *is elaborately cool and good-tempered.*

PHILIP. Miss Chancellor.

MISS CHANCELLOR *is even more elaborately cold and dignified.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Yes, sir.

PHILIP. I think we might tell Mrs. Brigstock we're sorry the accusation became public . . . it has naturally caused her pain.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*ascending the scale.*] I don't believe it . . . I didn't believe it . . . if I'd have believed it—

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*interposing.*] Oh, Freda !

MISS CHANCELLOR. [*very definitely.*] I saw them kissing. I didn't know Mr. Brigstock was a married man. But if I had known it . . . I saw them kissing.

MISS YATES, *opening her mouth for the first time, shows an easy impatience of their anger and their attitudes too.*

MISS YATES. Oh . . . what sort of a kiss ?

MISS CHANCELLOR. Are there different sorts of kisses, Miss Yates ?

MISS YATES. Yes, there are !

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*growing shrill now.*] He owns he did that, and he knows he shouldn't have and he asked my pardon . . . and whose business is it but mine . . . ?

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*vainly interposing this time.*] Oh, Freda !

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*climbing to hysterics.*] Hussy to make him though . . . hussy . . . hussy !

PHILIP *adds a little severity to his coolness.*

PHILIP. Mrs. Brigstock.

MISS YATES. [*as pleasant as possible.*] All right . . . Mr. Madras, I don't mind.

PHILIP. But I do. Mrs. Brigstock, I shall not attempt to clear up this business unless we can all manage to keep our tempers.

MISS YATES *collectedly explains.*

MISS YATES. I've been friends with Mr. Brigstock these twelve years. We both came into the firm together . . . and I knew he was married . . . p'raps I'm the only one that did. And when I told him . . . all I chose to tell him as to what had happened . . . and I felt a bit below myself that morning . . . I asked him to kiss me just to show he didn't think so much the worse of me. I had the impulse. And he gave me a kiss . . . here [*she dabs with one finger the left top corner of her forehead*], and that is the truth of that.

PHILIP. You might have given this explanation to Miss Chancellor.

MISS YATES. She wouldn't have believed it.

MISS CHANCELLOR. I don't believe it.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*with gathering force.*] William! William!! William!!!

BRIGSTOCK *desperately musters a little authority.*

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Freda, be quiet . . . haven't I sworn it to you on the Bible?

MISS CHANCELLOR *now puts her case.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. I may say I have known other young ladies in trouble, and whether they behaved properly or improperly under the circumstances . . . and I've known them behave both . . . they did not confide in their gentlemen friends . . . without the best of reasons.

PHILIP. There is no real reason they shouldn't, Miss Chancellor.

MISS CHANCELLOR. They didn't.

MISS YATES. Well . . . I did.

MISS CHANCELLOR. I had no wish for the scandal to get about. I don't know how it happened.

MISS YATES. Ask your little favourite, Miss Jordan, how it happened.

This shot tells. MISS CHANCELLOR'S *voice sharpens.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Mr. Madras, if I am to be accused of favouritism—

PHILIP. Yes, yes . . . we'll keep to the point, I think.

MISS CHANCELLOR. If Mr. Brigstock is not her husband, and if he wasn't the man—

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*the spring touched.*] William !

MISS CHANCELLOR. Why shouldn't she tell me who it was ?

MISS YATES. Why should I ?

MISS CHANCELLOR. Am I here to look after the morals of these young ladies or am I not ?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. A set of hussies !

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*in agony.*] Freda, you'll get me the sack.

PHILIP. Brigstock, if I wished to give any one the sack, I should not be taking the trouble to discuss this with you all in—I hope—a reasonable way.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *much resenting reasonableness, stands up now to give battle.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Oh, give him the sack, if you please, Mr. Madras. It's time he had it for his own sake.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. No, Freda !

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. You've got your way to make in the world, haven't you ? He's got to start on his own like other people, hasn't he ?

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*feeling safety and his situation slipping.*] In time, Freda.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Now's the time. If you're not sick of the life you lead . . . seeing me once a week for

an hour or two . . . then I am. And this libel and slander makes about the last straw, I should think.

PHILIP. How long have you been married, Mrs. Brigstock?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Four years.

PHILIP. Four years!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*a little quelled by his equable courtesy.*] Four years!

PHILIP. [*in amazed impatience.*] My dear Brigstock, why not have come to the firm and told them? It could have been arranged for you to live out with your wife.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Well, I have been thinking of it lately, sir, but I never seemed to happen on a really likely moment. I'm afraid I'm not a favourite in my department.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. No fault of his!

MR. BRIGSTOCK. And it's sometimes a very little thing makes the difference between a chap's going and staying . . . when all those that aren't wanted are cleared out after sale time, I mean, for instance. And of course the forty pound a year they allow you to live out on does not keep you . . . it's no use my saying it does. And when you're married . . .

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*who has gathered her grievances again.*] I agreed to it. I have my profession too. We've been saving quicker. It's three hundred pounds now, all but a bit . . . that's enough to start on. I've got my eye on the premises. It's near here, I don't mind telling you. Why shouldn't we do as well as others . . . and ride in our carriage when we're fifty!

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*deprecating such great optimism.*] Well, I've asked advice. . . .

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. You think too much of advice. If

you'd value yourself higher! Give him the sack, if you please, Mr. Madras, and I'll say thank you.

She finishes, and suddenly MISS YATES *takes up this part of the tale quite otherwise.*

MISS YATES. He asked my advice, and I told him to stay where he is.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*her breath leaving her.*] Oh, indeed!

MISS YATES. He's steady enough. But his appearance is against him . . . and he's too romantic.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*hardly recovering it.*] Well, I never!

MR. BRIGSTOCK. A chap does think of the future, Marion.

MISS YATES. Oh . . . premises near here and three hundred pounds. Perfect foolery and William ought to know it. This firm'll undersell you and eat you up and a dozen more like you . . . and the place that's trusted you for your stock will sell up every stick and there you'll be in the gutter. I advised him to own up to you [*she nods at* MRS. BRIGSTOCK] and live out and do the best he could.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*more drenched with the cold water than she'll own.*] I'm much obliged, I'm sure . . . I've my own opinion. . . .

PHILIP. [*who has been studying her rather anxiously.*] You've no children, Mrs. Brigstock?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK *goes white.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. No, I've no children. How can you save when you have children? But if it was his child this hussy was going to have and I thought God wouldn't strike him dead on the spot, I'd do it myself, so I would . . . and he knows I would.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Haven't I taken my oath to you, Freda?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. How can I tell if he's speaking the truth . . . I ask you how can I tell? I lie awake at

night away from him till I could scream with thinking about it. And I do scream as loud as I dare . . . not to wake the house. And if somebody don't open that window, I shall go off.

PHILIP. Open the window, please, Mr. Brigstock.

PHILIP's voice is serious, though he says but a simple thing. MR. BRIGSTOCK *opens the window as a man may do in a sick room, helpless, a little dazed. Then he turns back to his wife, who is sitting, head tilted against the sharp back of the plush bench, eyes shut, mouth open. Only* MISS YATES *is ready with her bit of practical comfort.*

MISS YATES. Here, don't you worry. I could have married William if I'd wanted. That ought to prove it to you.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. There, Freda !

MISS YATES. Before he knew you, though.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*opening her eyes.*] Did you ask her ?

MISS YATES. No, he never asked me . . . but you know what I mean.

MISS YATES *gives emphasis to this with what one fears must be described as a wink.* MRS. BRIGSTOCK *looks at the acquiescent* BRIGSTOCK *and acknowledges the implication.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Yes, I know. Oh, I don't believe it really.

Comforted, she discovers her handkerchief and blows her nose, after which MISS CHANCELLOR, *who has been sitting all this while still, silent, and scornful, inquires in her politest voice.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Do you wish me still to remain, Mr. Madras ?

PHILIP. One moment.

MISS YATES. Oh, you'll excuse my back, sir [*and she turns to the table again*].

PHILIP. I don't think I need detain you any longer, Mr. and Mrs. Brigstock. Your character is now quite clear in the firm's eyes, Brigstock, and I shall see that arrangements are made for you to live out in the future. I apologise to you both for all this unpleasantness.

They have both risen at this, and now BRIGSTOCK *begins hesitatingly.*

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Well . . . thank you . . . sir . . . and . . .

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. No, William.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. All right, Freda! [*He struggles into his prepared speech.*] We are very much obliged to you, sir, but I do not see how I can remain with the firm unless there has been, with regard to the accusation, some definite retractation.

PHILIP. [*near the end of his patience.*] My good man, it is retracted.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Publicly.

PHILIP. Nonsense, Mrs. Brigstock.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*quite herself again.*] Is it indeed . . . how would you like it? [*Then becoming self-conscious.*] Well, I beg pardon. I'm sure we're very sorry for Miss Yates and I wish she were married.

MISS YATES. [*with some gusto.*] So do I!

Suddenly MISS CHANCELLOR *bursts out.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Then, you wicked girl, why didn't you say so before . . . when I wanted to be kind to you? And we shouldn't all be talking in this outrageous indecent way. I never did in all my life. I don't know how I manage to sit here. Didn't I try to be kind to you?

MISS YATES. [*unconquerable.*] Yes, and you tried to cry over me. Well, I don't wish I were married, then.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Of course it's not for me to say,

Marion, but the way you're going on now won't ever stop the other young ladies tattling!

The tone of the dispute now sharpens rather dangerously.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. And how's Mr. Brigstock to remain in the firm if Miss Chancellor does?

PHILIP. That is my business, Mrs. Brigstock.

MISS CHANCELLOR. What . . . when I saw him kissing her . . . kissing her . . . !

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. William!

PHILIP. That has been explained.

MISS CHANCELLOR. No, Mr. Madras, while I'm housekeeper here I will not countenance loose behaviour. I don't believe one word of these excuses . . .

PHILIP. This is just obstinacy, Miss Chancellor.

MISS CHANCELLOR. And I wish to reiterate every single thing I said.

And now it degenerates into a wrangle.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Then the law shall deal with you.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Dismiss me if you wish to, Mr. Madras.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. It's libel . . . it's slander . . . !

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Oh, Freda, don't!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. She can be put in prison for it.

MISS CHANCELLOR. But if Miss Yates and Mr. Brigstock stay with this firm, I go.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. And she shall be put in prison . . . the cat.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Don't, Freda!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. The heartless cat! Do you swear it isn't true, William?

PHILIP. Take your wife away, Brigstock.

PHILIP'S *sudden vehemence causes* MRS. BRIGSTOCK *to make straight for the edge of her self-control—and over it.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Yes, and he takes himself away . . .

leaves the firm, I should think so, and sorry enough you'll be before we've done. I'll see what the law will say to her . . . and they're not a hundred yards off . . . on the better side of the street too and a plate glass window as big as yours.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Do be quiet, Freda!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*in hysterics now.*] Three hundred pounds, and how much did Maple have when he started . . . or Whiteley . . . and damages, what's more . . . And me putting up with the life I've led . . . !

They wait till the fit subsides—PHILIP *with kindly impatience,* BRIGSTOCK *in mute apology—and* MRS. BRIGSTOCK *is a mass of sobs. Then* BRIGSTOCK *edges her towards the door.*

PHILIP. Wait . . . wait . . . wait. You can't go into the passage making that noise.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Oh, Freda, you don't mean it.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*relieved and contrite.*] I'm sure I hope I've said nothing unbecoming a lady . . . I didn't mean to.

PHILIP. Not at all . . . it's natural you should be upset.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. And we're very much obliged for your kind intentions to us . . .

PHILIP. Wait till you're quite calm.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Thank you.

Then with a final touch of injury, resentment, dignity, she shakes off BRIGSTOCK'S *timid hold.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. You needn't hold me, William.

WILLIAM *follows her out to forget and make her forget it all as best he can.* PHILIP *comes back to his chair, still good-humoured, but not altogether pleased with his own part in the business so far.*

PHILIP. I'm afraid you've put yourself in the wrong, Miss Chancellor.

MISS CHANCELLOR. One often does, sir, in doing one's

duty. [*Then her voice rises to a sort of swan song.*] Thirty years have I been with the firm . . . only thirty years. I will leave to-morrow.

PHILIP. I hope you recognise it will not be my fault if you have to.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Miss Yates can obviate it. She has only to speak the truth.

PHILIP *now makes another effort to be frank and kindly.*

PHILIP. Miss Chancellor, are we quite appreciating the situation from Miss Yates's point of view? Suppose she were married?

MISS YATES. I'm not.

PHILIP. But if you told us you were, we should have to believe you.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Why, Mr. Madras?

PHILIP. [*with a smile.*] It would be good manners to believe her. And in matters of this sort we have to take a great deal on trust.

MISS YATES. [*who has quite caught on.*] Well, I did mean to stick that up on you . . . if any one wants to know. I bought a wedding ring, and I had it on when I saw Dr. Willoughby. But when she came in with her long face and her What can I do for you, my poor child? . . . well, I just couldn't . . . I suppose the Devil tempted me and I told her the truth.

PHILIP. Have you that wedding ring with you?

MISS YATES. It's not real gold.

PHILIP. Put it on.

MISS YATES, *having fished it out of a petticoat pocket, rather wonderingly does so, and* PHILIP *turns, maliciously humorous, to* MISS CHANCELLOR.

PHILIP. Now where are we, Miss Chancellor?

MISS CHANCELLOR. I think we're mocking at a very sacred thing, Mr. Madras.

MISS YATES. Yes . . . and I won't.

With a sudden access of emotion she slams the ring upon the table. PHILIP *meditates for a moment on the fact that there are some things in life still inaccessible to his light-hearted logic.*

PHILIP. There is also, of course, that point of view. But suppose the affair had not got about, Miss Yates?

MISS YATES. Well . . . I should have had a nice long illness. It'd all depend on whether you wanted me enough to keep my place open.

PHILIP. You are an employee of some value to the firm.

MISS YATES. Yes, I reckoned you would. Miss McIntyre'd be pleased to stay on a bit now she's quarrelled with her fiance-é. Of course if I'd only been behind the counter . . .

MISS CHANCELLOR. [*who has drawn the longest of breaths at this calculated immodesty.*] And this is how she brazened it out to me, Mr. Madras. This is what she told Mr. Huxtable . . . and you'll pardon my saying he took a very different view of the matter to what you seem to be taking.

MISS YATES. Oh, I've got to go now I'm found out . . . I'm not arguing about it.

MISS CHANCELLOR. [*severely.*] Mr. Madras, what sort of notions are you fostering in this wretched girl's mind?

PHILIP. [*gently enough.*] I am trying for the moment to put myself in her place.

MISS CHANCELLOR. You will excuse me saying, sir, that you are a man . . .

PHILIP. Not at all!

A poor joke, but MISS CHANCELLOR *remains unconscious of it.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Because a woman is independent and earning her living, she's not to think she can go on as she pleases. If she wishes to have children, Provi-

dence has provided a way in the institution of marriage. Miss Yates would have found small difficulty in getting married, I gather.

MISS YATES. Living in here for twelve years!

MISS CHANCELLOR. Have you been a prisoner, Miss Yates? Not to mention that there are two hundred and thirty-five gentlemen employed here.

MISS YATES. Supposing I don't like any of em.

MISS CHANCELLOR. My dear Miss Yates, if you are merely looking for a husband as such . . . well . . . we're all God's creatures, I suppose! Personally, I don't notice much difference in men, anyway.

MISS YATES. Nor did I.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Lack of self-control . . .

MISS YATES. Oh, yes!

MISS CHANCELLOR. . . . And self-respect. That's what the matter is. Are we beasts of the field, I should like to know? I simply do not understand this unladylike attitude towards the facts of life. Is there nothing for a woman to do in the world but to run after men . . . or pretend to run away from them? I am fifty-eight . . . and I have passed, thank God, a busy and a happy and I hope a useful life . . . and I have never thought any more or less of men than I have of any other human beings . . . or any differently. I look upon spinsterhood as an honourable state, as my Bible teaches me to. Men are different. But some women marry happily and well . . . and all women can't . . . and some can't marry at all. These facts have to be faced, I take it.

PHILIP. Miss Yates has, no doubt, been facing them.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Yes, sir, but in what spirit? I have always endeavoured to influence the young ladies under my control towards the virtues of modesty and decorum . . . so that they may regard either state with an indifferent mind. If I can no longer do that,

I prefer to resign my charge. I will say before this young person that I regret the story should have got about. But when any one has committed a fault, it seems to me immaterial who knows of it.

PHILIP. [*reduced to irony.*] Do you really think so?

MISS CHANCELLOR. Do you require me any more now?

PHILIP. I am glad to have had your explanation. We'll have a private talk to-morrow.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Thank you, sir. I think that will be more in order. Good morning.

PHILIP. Good morning.

MISS CHANCELLOR has expressed herself to her entire satisfaction and retires in good order. MISS YATES, *conscientiously brazen until the enemy has quite disappeared, collapses pathetically. And* PHILIP, *at his ease at last, begins to scold her in a most brotherly manner.*

MISS YATES. I'm sure she's quite right in all she says.

PHILIP. Are you! Then are you the sort of young woman to have got yourself into this scrape?

MISS YATES. No . . . I don't want you to think I'm that, sir.

PHILIP. Then what on earth did you go and do it for? You're not a fool.

MISS YATES. Of course I didn't set out to.

PHILIP. Why aren't you married?

MISS YATES. That's my business. [*Then, to make amends for this sudden snap.*] Oh, I've thought often enough of getting married. But look what it comes to . . . look at the Brigstocks!

PHILIP. No, no . . . why aren't you to be married now?

MISS YATES. I'd rather not say.

This reticence may be natural enough. But PHILIP *seems to detect something odd in it.*

PHILIP. Very well.

MISS YATES. I'd rather not talk about that to you at all, sir, if you don't mind. [*Then she bursts out again.*] I took the risk. I knew what I was up to . . . at least, I thought I knew. And I thought I'd have my fling before I came back here to settle down for evermore, amen . . . to boss the Costumes, which I was to—and set the other girls a good example. And it was fun . . . some of it. That may sound horrid . . . but it was. And it was different. And if I am sorry I did it, I'm not going to say so now.

PHILIP. Well . . . I haven't asked you to, have I? I have unconventional opinions, Miss Yates.

MISS YATES. Yes. We're far more frightened of you, sir, than we are of Mr. Huxtable.

PHILIP. Why?

MISS YATES. We never know what you'll say next.

PHILIP. Still, even I don't do very unconventional things.

MISS YATES. Why don't you?

PHILIP. Frankly . . . I prefer a quiet life.

MISS YATES. I expect you're right. It is safer.

PHILIP. But if you set out on this adventure believing all the conventional people tell you . . . why, I'm not very happy about your prospects.

MISS YATES. Oh, that's all right, sir. When you're up against it you don't bother about believing things or not. I've got my plans. I'll be getting two forty a year living out. [*She grows happily confidential.*] There's a maisonette at Raynes Park and I can get a cheap girl to look after it and take care of . . . I shall call him my nephew, like the Popes of Rome used to . . . or I can be a widow. I can bring him up and do him well on it. Insurance'll be a bit stiff in case anything happens to me. But I've got nearly two hundred saved in the bank to see me through till next summer.

PHILIP. Where are you going when you leave here? What relations have you?

MISS YATES. I have an aunt. I hate her.

PHILIP. Where are you going for the winter?

MISS YATES. Evercreech.

PHILIP. Where's that?

MISS YATES. I don't know. You get to it from Waterloo. I found it in the A. B. C.

PHILIP. [*in protest.*] But, my dear girl . . . !

MISS YATES. Well, I want a place where nobody knows me, so I'd better go to one I don't know, hadn't I? I always make friends. I'm not afraid of people. And I've never been in the country in the winter. I want to see what it's like.

PHILIP *surrenders, on this point beaten; but he takes up another more seriously.*

PHILIP. Well . . . you may not want a husband . . . but a father should help support his child.

MISS YATES *is ready for it; serious, too.*

MISS YATES. I know! But I've seen other girls in this sort of mess . . . with people being kind to them . . . and despising them . . . and the fellow who'd done it just hating them . . . while they had to sit around and look ashamed and cry. He can forget about me if he likes . . . which he will. I don't know now if I care whether he hates me or not. But I won't be despised by any jealous old cat. And that's what's wrong with Miss C. Crossed in love she was . . . and we all know it.

PHILIP. Really, I don't think there's any evidence of that.

MISS YATES. Then she only wishes she had been. I did cry my eyes out for a start. Then I thought if I couldn't buck up and anyhow pretend to be pleased about it I'd be better in the river. And, d'you know, sir, when I'd been pretending a bit, I found I really

was pleased. And I'm really happy about it now . . . if they let me alone . . . I'm not pretending. I've done what I shouldn't. But if any one thinks I'm going to the devil now just because I ought to . . . well, they're wrong. And if I might ask you, sir, not to mention . . .

At this moment a telephone on the table rings violently, and MISS YATES *apologises—to it, apparently.*

MISS YATES. Oh, I beg pardon.

PHILIP. Excuse me. [*Then answering.*] Yes. Who? No, no, no . . . State. Mr. State. Put him through [*He is evidently put through.*] Morning! Who? My father . . . not yet. Yes, from Marienbad.

MISS YATES *gets up, apparently to withdraw tactfully, but looking a little startled, too.*

MISS YATES. Shall I . . .

PHILIP. No, no; it's all right.

BELHAVEN *knocks, comes in and stands waiting by* PHILIP, *who telephones on.*

PHILIP. Yes? Well? . . . Who . . . Mark who? . . . Aurelius. No. I've not been reading him lately . . . Certainly I will . . . Thomas is here doing figures . . . d'you want him . . . I'll put you through. . . . No, wait. I'll call him here, if it's not private. [*Then calling out.*] Tommy!

BELHAVEN. Major Thomas is in the counting-house, sir.

PHILIP. Oh. [*Then through the telephone.*] If you'll hold the line I can get him in a minute. Say Mr. State's on the telephone for him, Belhaven.

BELHAVEN. Yes, sir . . . and Mrs. Madras is below in a taxi, sir, and would like to speak to you. Shall she come up or, if you're too busy to be interrupted, will you come down to her?

PHILIP. My mother?

BELHAVEN. No, not Mrs. Madras . . your Mrs. Madras, sir.

PHILIP. Bring her up. And tell Major Thomas.

BELHAVEN. Yes, sir.

BELHAVEN achieves a greased departure and PHILIP *turns back to* MISS YATES.

PHILIP. Where were we ?

MISS YATES. [*inconsequently.*] It is hot in here, isn't it ?

PHILIP. The window's open.

MISS YATES. Shall I shut it ?

She turns and goes up to the window ; one would say to run away from him. PHILIP *watches her steadily.*

PHILIP. What's the matter, Miss Yates ?

She comes back more collectedly.

MISS YATES. And I'm sure Miss Chancellor can't expect me to marry one like that now . . . can she ?

PHILIP. Marry who ?

MISS YATES. Not that I say anything against Mr. Belhaven . . . he'll grow up a very nice young man. And he did try to propose last Christmas. He was festive . . . and he'd got his first raise of salary. But the fact is it's only the very young men that ever do ask you to marry them here. When they get older they seem to lose heart . . . or they think it'll cost too much . . . or . . . but I'm sure it's not important.

This very out-of-place chatter dies away under PHILIP'S *sternly enquiring gaze.*

PHILIP. There's just one thing more. This trouble isn't in any way due to our sending you to Bond Street, is it ?

MISS YATES. [*diving into many words again.*] Oh, of course it was most kind of you to send me to Bond Street to get a polish on. But I tell you . . . I couldn't have stood it for long. The ladies that come in there . . . it does just break your nerve. What with following

them round . . . and trying this for them and that for them . . . and the things they say you've got to hear, and the things they'll say . . . about you half the time . . . that you've got not to hear . . . and keep your voice low and sweet, and let your arms hang down straight. You may work more hours with us, and I daresay it's not smart, but the customers are friendly.

PHILIP. . . . Because, you see, Mr. Huxtable and I would feel rather unhappy if it was any one connected with us who . . .

MISS YATES. [*quite desperately.*] No, you needn't . . . indeed you needn't. Though I will say there's something in that other place that does set your mind going about men. What he saw in me I never could think . . . honestly, I couldn't, though I think a good deal of myself, I can assure you. But it was all my own fault, and so's the rest of it going to be . . . my very own . . .

MAJOR THOMAS'S *arrival is to* MISS YATES *a very welcome interruption, as she seems, perhaps by the hypnotism of* PHILIP'S *steady look, to be getting nearer and nearer to saying just what she means not to. He comes in at a good speed, glancing back along the passage, and saying . . .*

THOMAS. Here's Jessica.

PHILIP. State on the telephone.

THOMAS. Thank you.

And he makes for it as JESSICA *comes to the open door.* PHILIP'S *wife is an epitome of all that æsthetic culture can do for a woman. More: She is the result—not of thirty-three years—but of three or four generations of cumulative refinement. She might be a race horse! Come to think of it, it is a very wonderful thing to have raised this crop of ladyhood. Creatures, dainty in mind and body, gentle in thought and word, charming, delicate, sensitive,*

graceful, chaste, credulous of all good, shaming the world's ugliness and strife by the very ease and delightsomeness of their existence; fastidious—fastidious—fastidious; also in these latter years with their attractions more generally salted by the addition of learning and humour. Is not the perfect lady perhaps the most wonderful achievement of civilisation, and worth the cost of her breeding, worth the toil and the helotage of—all the others?

JESSICA MADRAS *is even something more than a lady, for she is conscious of her ladyhood. She values her virtue and her charm: she is proud of her culture and fosters it. It is her weapon, it justifies her. As she floats now into the ugly room, exquisite from her eyelashes to her shoes, it is a great relief—just the sight of her.*

JESSICA. Am I interrupting?

PHILIP. No, come in, my dear.

THOMAS. [*into the telephone.*] Hullo!

PHILIP. Well, Miss Yates, I'll see, if I can, that you're treated as considerately . . . as you'll allow me to treat you.

THOMAS. Hullo!

PHILIP. You don't know my wife. Jessica, this is Miss Yates, who is in our costume room. You're not actually working in your department now, I suppose?

MISS YATES. [*as defiant of all scandal.*] I am.

THOMAS. [*still to the unresponsive telephone.*] Hullo! Hullo!

PHILIP. [*finding* MISS YATES *beyond—possibly above him.*] Very well. That'll do now.

But MISS YATES, *by the presence of* JESSICA, *is now brought to her best costume department manner. She can assume at will, it seems, a new face, a new voice; can become, indeed, a black-silk being of another species.*

MISS YATES. Thank you, sir. I hope I've not talked too much. I always was a chatterbox, madam.

PHILIP. The matter was an important one, Miss Yates.

MISS YATES. Not at all, sir. Good morning, madam.

JESSICA. Good morning.

And there is an end of MISS YATES. *Meanwhile the telephone is reducing* THOMAS *to impotent fury.*

THOMAS. They've cut him off.

While he raps the receiver's arm fit to break it JESSICA *produces an opened telegram, which she hands to* PHILIP.

JESSICA. This . . . just after you left.

PHILIP. My dear, coming all this way with it! Why didn't you telephone?

THOMAS. [*hearing something at last.*] Hullo . . . is that Mr. State's office? No! Well . . . Telephone Room, are you still through to it?

JESSICA *is watching with an amused smile.*

JESSICA. I hate the telephone, especially the one here. Hark at you, Tommy, poor wretch! They put you through from office to office . . . six different clerks . . . all stupid and all with hideous voices.

PHILIP *has now read his telegram and is making a face.*

PHILIP. I suppose she must come if she wants to.

JESSICA. What'll your father say?

PHILIP. My dear girl . . . she has a right to see him if she insists . . . it's very foolish. Here, Tommy! [*He ousts him from the telephone and deals expertly with it.*] I want a telegram sent. Then get double three double 0 Central, and plug through to my room . . . not here . . . my room.

THOMAS. [*fervently.*] Thank yer.

JESSICA. Got over your temper at the play last night?

THOMAS. Oh, sort of play you must expect if you go to the theatre on a Sunday. Scuse me.

Having admiringly sized up JESSICA *and her costume, he bolts.* PHILIP *sits down to compose his telegram in reply.* JESSICA, *discovering that there is nothing attractive on sit on, hovers.*

PHILIP. Can you put her up for the night?

JESSICA. Yes.

PHILIP. Shall I ask her to dinner?

JESSICA. She'll cry into the soup . . . but never mind that.

PHILIP. Dinner at eight?

JESSICA. I sound inhospitable.

PHILIP. I've only said we shall be delighted.

JESSICA. But your mother dislikes me so. It's difficult to see much of her.

PHILIP. We must have patience with her, Jessica.

JESSICA. So I'm always telling you. I only wish she wouldn't write Mildred silly letters about God.

PHILIP. A grandmother's privilege.

JESSICA. The child sends me on another one this morning . . . didn't I show it you?

PHILIP. No.

JESSICA. Miss Gresham writes, too. She puts it quite nicely. But it's an awful thing, she says, for a school to get religion into it.

BELHAVEN *slides in.*

BELHAVEN. Yessir.

PHILIP. Send this at once, please.

BELHAVEN. Yessir.

BELHAVEN *slides out. Then* PHILIP *starts attending to the little pile of letters he brought in with him.* JESSICA, *neglected, hovers more widely.*

JESSICA. Come out to lunch, Phil?

PHILIP. Lord, is it lunch time!

JESSICA. I'm lunching with Margaret Inman and Walter Muirhead at the Berkeley.

PHILIP. Then you won't be lonely.

JESSICA. [*mischievous.*] Margaret may be if you don't come.

PHILIP. I can't. I'm not nearly through.

She comes to rest by his table and starts to play with the things on it, finding at last a blotting roller that gives satisfaction.

JESSICA. Phil, you might come out with me a little more than you do.

PHILIP. [*humorously final.*] My dear, not at lunch time.

JESSICA. Attractive little woman you'd been scolding when I came in.

PHILIP. Is she?

JESSICA. Didn't you think so?

PHILIP. I'm afraid I don't often notice whether women are attractive or not . . . unless they mean me to. And then I don't find them so.

JESSICA. What a husband!

PHILIP. D'you disapprove?

JESSICA. I'm a woman! Last day of Walter's pictures. He has sold all but about five . . . and there's one I wish you'd buy.

PHILIP. Can't afford it.

JESSICA. I suppose, Phil, you're not altogether sorry you married me.

Although PHILIP *is used enough to her charming and reasoned inconsequence, he really jumps.*

PHILIP. Good heavens! Well, we've survived twelve years of it, haven't we?

JESSICA *puts her head on one side and is quite half serious.*

JESSICA. Are you in the least glad you married me?

PHILIP. My dear . . . I don't think about it. Jessica, in business hours I'm no good at repartee.

She floats away at once, half seriously snubbed and hurt.

JESSICA. I'm sorry . . . I'm interrupting.

PHILIP. [*remorseful at once, for she is so pretty.*] No, never mind. These aren't important.

But he goes on with his letters and JESSICA *stands looking at him, her face hardening just a little.*

JESSICA. But there are times when I get tired of waiting for you to finish your letters.

PHILIP. I know . . . I never quite finish my letters nowadays. You've got a fit of the idle-fidgets. Shall we take the car somewhere this week-end?

THOMAS *bundles into the tête-à-tête, saying as he comes . . .*

THOMAS. He'll make an offer for the place here too, Phil.

PHILIP. Good.

JESSICA *stands there, looking her prettiest.*

JESSICA. Tommy, come out and lunch . . . Phil won't.

THOMAS. I'm afraid I can't.

JESSICA. I've got to meet Maggie Inman and young Muirhead. He'll flirt with her all the time. If there isn't a fourth I shall be fearfully in the cold.

PHILIP. [*overcome by such tergiversation.*] Oh, Jessica!

THOMAS *is nervous, apparently; at least he is neither ready nor gallant.*

THOMAS. Yes, of course you will. But I'm afraid I can't.

JESSICA. [*in cheerful despair.*] Well, I won't drive to Peckham again of a morning. Wednesday, then, will you call for me?

THOMAS. Wednesday?

JESSICA. Symphony Concert.

THOMAS. [*with sudden seriousness.*] D'you know I'm afraid I can't on Wednesday either.

JESSICA. Why not ?

THOMAS. [*though the pretence withers before a certain sharpness in her question.*] Well . . . I'm afraid I can't.

It is evident that JESSICA *has a temper bred to a point of control which makes it the nastier, perhaps. She now becomes very cold, very civil, very swift.*

JESSICA. We settled it only last night. What's the time ?

PHILIP. Five to one.

JESSICA. I must go. I shall be late.

THOMAS. [*with great concern.*] Have you got the car, or d'you want a cab ?

JESSICA. Yes . . . and no, thank you.

THOMAS. We might do the next, perhaps.

JESSICA. All right, Tommy . . . don't be conscience-stricken. But when you change your mind about going out with me, it's pleasanter if you'll find some excuse. Good-bye, you two.

And she is gone ; PHILIP *calling after her—*

PHILIP. I shall be in by seven, my dear.

THOMAS *looks a little relieved, and then considerably worried ; in fact, he frowns portentously.* PHILIP *disposes of his last letter.*

PHILIP. Companionship in marriage isn't so simple a matter as it should be.

THOMAS. [*without interest.*] Oh !

PHILIP. Well, is it ? What have we got to settle before this meeting ?

THOMAS. Nothing much. [*Then seeming to make up his mind to something.*] But I want three minutes' talk with you, old man.

PHILIP. Go ahead.

And he gets up and stretches.

THOMAS. D'you mind if I say something caddish ?

PHILIP. Not a bit.

THOMAS. Put your foot down and don't have me asked to your house quite so often.

PHILIP *looks at him for half a puzzled minute.*

PHILIP. Why not?

THOMAS. I'm seeing too much of your wife.

He is so intensely solemn about it that PHILIP *can hardly even pretend to be shocked.*

PHILIP. My dear Tommy!

THOMAS. I don't mean one word more than I say.

PHILIP. [*good-naturedly.*] But what nonsense!

THOMAS. I don't want you to suppose that I'm the least bit in love with her.

PHILIP. Naturally not . . . you've a wife of your own.

THOMAS. [*in intense brotherly agreement.*] Right. That's good horse sense.

PHILIP. As her husband, I'm naturally obtuse in the matter . . . but I really don't think that Jessica is in love with you.

THOMAS. [*most generously.*] Not for a single minute.

PHILIP. Then what's the worry, you silly old ass?

THOMAS *starts to explain, a little tortuously.*

THOMAS. Phil, this is a damned subtle world. I don't pretend to understand it . . . I don't know that I want to understand it . . . but in my old age I have got a sort of rule-of-thumb experience to go by . . . which, mark you, I've paid for.

PHILIP. Well?

THOMAS. Phil, I don't really like women and I never did. But I'm not exaggerating when I say I married to break the habit of finding myself once every six months in such a position with one of them that I was supposed to be making love to her.

PHILIP *is enjoying himself.*

PHILIP. What do they see in you, Tommy?

THOMAS. God knows . . . I don't. And the time it took up! I fell in love with Mary and, thank God, she wasn't married and she did want to marry me . . . and I wouldn't be without her and the children now for all I ever saw. But I don't believe I'd have brought that off if I hadn't been driven to it, Phil, . . . driven to it. I'm not going to start the old game again now [*and he wags his head wisely*].

PHILIP. Well, what has Jessica been up to . . . if you must confide in me?

THOMAS *gathers himself up to launch the vindicating compliment effectively.*

THOMAS. Nothing . . . nothing whatever! She's a most accomplished and a charming and a sweet-natured woman . . . and an ornament to society.

PHILIP. [*with equal fervour.*] You're quite right, Tommy, . . . what are we to do with them?

THOMAS. [*it's his favourite phrase.*] What d'you mean?

PHILIP. Well . . . what's your trouble?

THOMAS. [*tortuously still.*] There ain't any yet . . . that's the point. But . . . well . . . I've been dreading for the last three weeks that she'd begin talking to me about you. That's why I'm talking to you about her. [*Then, with a certain enjoyment of his shocking looseness of behaviour.*] I am a cad!

PHILIP. [*still amused—but now rather sub-acidly.*] But let her. I don't mind.

THOMAS. Well, I do. It's one of the ways it begins. Last night in the cab she started about when she was a girl . . .

PHILIP. While I walked home. Tactful husband!

THOMAS. Phil . . . don't you be French.

PHILIP, *suddenly serious, turns to him.*

PHILIP. But, Tommy, do you suppose she is unhappy with me?

THOMAS. No . . . not more than any woman would be!

PHILIP. Thank you.

THOMAS. I mean . . .

PHILIP. You mean that. And thank you is what I mean. You hit the mark.

THOMAS. Oh, I've always got on with you, Phil. But it is a bit like carrying a razor in one's pocket. And she thinks a bit . . . when she's bored with people and music and her pictures and her books. And besides, once you begin putting your feelings into words . . . they grow.

PHILIP. Wholesomer they should, perhaps. I wish she would talk to you.

THOMAS *shakes his head vehemently.*

THOMAS. Well, I'd rather not.

PHILIP. Heavens above us! You're my friend and you're hers. And you mayn't be clever, Tommy . . . but you have a heart!

THOMAS. That's what I'm telling you . . . and things always begin this way.

PHILIP. Can't you let a woman talk seriously to you without making love to her?

THOMAS. Damn it, that's what they say . . . but it never made any difference.

PHILIP. Tommy, you're a perfect child!

THOMAS. I remember when I was twenty-four . . . there was one woman . . . years older than me . . . had a grown-up son. She took to scolding me for wasting my time philandering. Told me she'd done it in her time . . . and what dust and ashes it was . . . talked like a book to me. I kept off kissing her for six weeks and I'd have sworn she never wanted me to kiss her. But I did.

PHILIP. Did she box your ears?

THOMAS. No . . . said she could hardly take me

seriously . . . I was so young. Well . . . if I'd bolted that would have been priggish. And if I'd stayed I'd have done it again.

PHILIP. [*mischievously.*] Which did you do?

THOMAS. Never you mind.

PHILIP. [*with the utmost geniality.*] Well, if you think Jessica wants you to kiss her . . . try it . . . politely!

THOMAS. Thanks, old man . . . that's very clever and up to date and all the rest of it . . . but I've asked you to chuck me out of the house.

PHILIP. Well, I shan't.

THOMAS. Then you're no friend of mine.

PHILIP. Let us put it brutally. If Jessica wishes to be unfaithful to me how am I to stop her . . . even if I've a right to stop her? No . . . I've my own self-respect to think of.

THOMAS. If you can't behave like a decent married man you've no right to be married . . . you're a danger.

PHILIP. I will not play the benevolent Turk. If you can't help making love to my wife. . . .

THOMAS. I'm not making love to your wife. I told you so.

PHILIP. Well, if she's making love to you that's your trouble.

THOMAS. She isn't making love to me. But if you can't take a hint—

PHILIP. A hint! Well . . . I'm dashed!

THOMAS. All right! I've given you fair warning of the sort of fool I am . . . I'll take no more responsibility in the matter.

PHILIP. [*in comic exasperation.*] Why not tell Jessica you're afraid of making a fool of yourself with her?

THOMAS. [*his eyebrows up.*] But that'd be as good as doing it. Good lord, you can't behave to women as if they were men!

PHILIP. Why not?

THOMAS. You try it!

PHILIP. I always do.

THOMAS. No wonder she wants to grumble about you.

PHILIP *takes him seriously again.*

PHILIP. Tommy, I know Jessica pretty well. She doesn't want to be made love to.

THOMAS. [*positively and finally.*] Yes, she does. [*Then with real chivalry.*] I don't mean that unpleasantly . . . but all women do. Some of em want to be kissed and some want you to talk politics . . . but the principle's the same.

PHILIP. [*finely contemptuous.*] What a world you live in!

THOMAS. . . . And the difficulty with me is that if I try to talk politics I find they don't know enough about it . . . or else they know too much about it . . . and it's simpler to kiss em and have done.

PHILIP. Oh, much simpler!

THOMAS. [*back to his starting-point — pathetic.*] But I'm married now and I want a quiet life . . .

A knock at the door interrupts him.

PHILIP. Come in.

It is BELHAVEN.

BELHAVEN. Will you lunch, sir?

PHILIP. What is there?

BELHAVEN. I'm afraid only the Usual, sir.

PHILIP. Can you manage the Usual, Tommy? What is it, Belhaven?

BELHAVEN. Roast beef and a jam pudding, I think, sir. [*Then as confessing to a vulgarity.*] Roly-poly.

THOMAS. [*with great approval.*] Right. I hope it's strawberry jam.

PHILIP. Sure to be. Put it in Mr. Huxtable's room, will you . . . that's airy.

BELHAVEN. Yessir.

BELHAVEN *vanishes.*

THOMAS. [*as on reflection.*] Not plum, y'know . . . plum's no use.

PHILIP *gathers up his papers.*

PHILIP. Well . . . we've had some good sensible times together, all three. I'll save the situation if I can.

THOMAS. Only do be tactful, Phil.

PHILIP. No, I talk to my wife as I talk to myself.

THOMAS. And that's no sign of sanity either!

PHILIP. Tommy, you're turning into a wit. I shall grow jealous of you.

THOMAS. Aha! I tell you! You kick me down your front steps while you can.

PHILIP. Come on . . . the roly-poly waits.

They go out. The room is left to its ugliness.

ACT III

Some thirty years back the Madras House was established in its present premises. Decoration in those days was rather trade than art; but MR. CONSTANTINE MADRAS, *ever daring, proceeded to beautify the home of his professional triumphs according to his own taste and fancy, and being a man of great force of character, produced something which, though extraordinarily wrong, was yet, since it was sincere, effective in its way.*

There have been changes since, but one room has remained untouched. This is the rotunda, a large, lofty, sky-lighted place, done in the Moorish style. The walls are black marble to the height of a man, and from there to the ceiling the darkest red. The ceiling is of a cerulean blue; and in the middle of the sky-light a golden sun, with spiked rays proceeding from its pleasant human countenance, takes credit for some of the light it intercepts. An archway with fretted top leads from the rest of the establishment. Another has behind it a platform, a few steps high, hung with black velvet. There is also a small door, little more than head high. On the floor is a Persian carpet of some real beauty. On the walls are gas brackets (now fitted for electric light), the Oriental touch achieved in their crescent shape. Round the wall are divans, many-cushioned; in front of them little coffee stools. It is all about as Moorish as Baker Street Station used to be in the days of the old sulphurous Underground, but the general effect

is humorous, pleasant, and not undignified. In the grand days of the Madras House the rotunda was the happy preserve of very special customers, those on whom the great man himself would keep an eye. If you had been there you spoke of it casually; and to be free of the rotunda was to be a well-dressed woman; moreover, to be recognised as such. Ichabod! The Madras House is old-fashioned now, and County ladies bring their daughters because it would be such a pity for dear Daphne, or Pamela, or Cynthia not to have the very latest thing for the County Ball. Not that its present management doesn't endeavour to keep in the race. Models from Paris, ladies as chiefs of the various rooms, who are real ladies, and let you know it, too, by the glassy graciousness or the off-hand civility with which they variously greet the too-ready-to-be-intimidated customer. But, since MR. CONSTANTINE MADRAS *retired, the spirit of the place has faded, and a board of directors cannot revive it. For the accommodation of this same board, a large oval "Moorish" table had to be imported to the rotunda, and half-a-dozen "Moorish" chairs provided. They had, in fact, to be designed and made in the Tottenham Court Road; but they are at least the appropriate furniture for this scene, as it is to be, of the passing of the Madras House into alien hands.*

At three o'clock on the Monday afternoon the deal is to be put through, and it is now five minutes to. MAJOR THOMAS *is there, sitting at the table; papers spread before him, racking his brain with a few final figures.* PHILIP *is there, in rather a school-boyish mood. He is sitting on the table, swinging his legs.* MR. HUXTABLE *is there, too, dressed in his best, important and nervous, and he is talking to* MR. EUSTACE PERRIN STATE.

MR. STATE *is an American, and if American magazine literature is anything to go by, no American is altogether unlike him. He has a rugged, blood and iron sort of face, utterly belied by his soft, smiling eyes; rightly belied, too, for he has made his thirty or forty millions (dollars though) in the gentlest and slickest way. You would not think of him as a money-maker. And, indeed, he has no love of money and little use for it, for his tastes are simple. But this is the honourable career in his own country, and he has the instinct for turning money over and the knack of doing so on a big scale. His shock of grey hair makes him look older than he probably is; his voice is almost childlike in its sweetness. He has some of the dignity and aptitude for command that power can give.*

From the little canopied door comes in MR. WINDLESHAM, *present manager of the establishment. He is a tailor-made man; and the tailor only left off for the wax modeller and wigmaker to begin. For his clothes are too perfect to be worn by anything but a dummy, and his hair and complexion are far from human. Not that he dyes or paints them; no, they were made like that. His voice is a little inhuman, too, and as he prefers the French language, with which he has a more unripe acquaintance, to his own, and so speaks English as much like French as his French is like English, his conversation seems as unreal as the rest of him. Impossible to think of him in any of the ordinary relations of life. He is a functionary. Nature, the great inventor, will evolve, however roughly, what is necessary for her uses. Millinery has evolved the man-milliner. As he comes in—and he has the gait of a water-wagtail—* MR. HUXTABLE *is making conversation.*

MR. HUXTABLE. A perfect barometer, as you might say—when your eye gets trained to it.

WINDLESHAM. [*to* PHILIP; *and with a wag of his head back to the other room.*] They're just ready.

MR. STATE. [*smiling benevolently at* MR. HUXTABLE.] Is it really? The Crystal Palace! What a fairy sound that has!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*with modest pride.*] And a very ealthy locality!

PHILIP. Come along and meet State. [*He jumps off the table, capturing* WINDLESHAM'S *arm.*]

MR. STATE. [*enthusiastic.*] Denmark Hill. Named so for Queen Alexandra!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*struck by the information.*] Was it now?

MR. STATE. Herne Hill . . . Herne the Hunter! That's the charm of London to an American. Association. Every spot speaks.

PHILIP. [*as he joins them.*] This is Mr. Windlesham . . . our manager. He's going to show us some new models.

MR. STATE. [*impressively extends a hand and repeats the name.*] Mr. Windlesham.

WINDLESHAM. Most happy. I thought you'd like to see the very latest . . . brought them from Paris only yesterday.

MR. STATE. Most opportune! [*Then with a sweeping gesture.*] Mr. Philip, I react very keenly to the charm and tradition of this room. Your father designed it?

PHILIP. Yes.

MR. STATE. I thought so.

PHILIP. That used to be his private office.

MR. STATE. [*reverently.*] Indeed! Where the duchess went on her knees. An historic spot.

PHILIP. Something of a legend that.

MR. STATE, *intensely solemn, seems now to ascend the pulpit of some philosophic conventicle.*

MR. STATE. Let us cling to legends, sir . . . they are the spiritual side of facts. They go to form tradition. And it is not given to man to found his institutions in security of mind except upon tradition. That is why our eyes turn eastward to you from America, Mr. Huxtable.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*in some awe.*] Do they now?

MR. STATE. Has it never struck you that while the progress of man has been in the path of the sun, his thoughts continually go back to the place of its rising? I have found that a very stimulating idea.

PHILIP. [*not indecently commonplace.*] Well, have them in now, Windlesham, while we're waiting.

WINDLESHAM. You might cast your eyes over these new mannequins, Mr. Philip . . . the very best I could find, I do assure you. Faces are hard enough to get, but figures . . . well, there! [*Reaching the little door, he calls through.*] Allons Mes'moiselles! Non . . . non . . . par l'autre porte à la gauche. [*Then back again.*] You get the best effect through the big doorway. [*He further explains this by sketching one in the air.*] One, two and four first.

He rapidly distributes some costume drawings he has been carrying, and then vanishes into the other room, from where his voice vibrates.

WINDLESHAM. En avant, s'il vous plaît. Numéro un! Eh bien! . . . numéro trois. Non Ma'moiselle, ce n'est pas commode . . . regarder ce corsage-là. . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. [*making a face.*] What I'm always thinking is, why not have a manly chap in charge of the place up here.

MR. STATE. [*with perfect justice.*] Mr. Windlesham may be said to strike a note . . . and a very distinctive note! . . .

Through the doorway WINDLESHAM *ushers in a costume from Paris, which is hung upon a young*

lady of pleasing appearance, preoccupied with its exhibition, which she achieves by swift and sinuous, never-ceasing movements. She wears a smile also.

WINDLESHAM. One and two are both Larguillière, Mr. Philip. He can't get in the Soupçon Anglais, can he? Won't . . . I tell him. Promenez et sortez Ma'moiselle.

The young lady, still smiling and sinuous, begins to circle the room. She seems to be unconscious of its inhabitants, and they, in return, rather dreadfully pretend not to notice her, but only the costume.

WINDLESHAM. Numéro deux.

Another costume; the young lady contained in it is as swift-moving and sinuous and as vacantly smiling.

WINDLESHAM. Pleasant motif that, isn't it? Promenez.

MR. STATE. [*in grave enquiry.*] What is the Soupçon Anglais?

PHILIP. A Frenchman will tell you that for England you must first make a design and then spoil it.

THOMAS. [*whose attention has been riveted.*] Don't they speak English?

WINDLESHAM. Oh, pas un mot . . . I mean, not a word. Only came over with me yesterday, these three.

THOMAS. Because this frock's a bit thick, y'know.

WINDLESHAM. Numéro trois!

A third costume, calculated to have an innocent effect. The accompanying young lady, with a sense of fitness, wears a pout instead of a smile.

PHILIP. What's this? [*His eye is on the surmounting hat of straw.*]

WINDLESHAM. [*with a little crow of delight.*] That's the new hat. La belle Hélène again!

MR. STATE. [*interested. Still grave.*] La belle Hélène. A Parisian firm?

WINDLESHAM. [*turning this to waggish account.*] Well

. . . dear me . . . you could almost call her that, couldn't you? [*Suddenly he dashes at the costume and brings it to a standstill.*] Oh, lala, le gilet! Quelle tracasserie!

He proceeds to arrange le gilet to his satisfaction, also some other matters which seem to involve a partial evisceration of the underclothing. The young lady, passive, pouts perseveringly. He is quite unconscious of her separate existence. But THOMAS *is considerably shocked and whispers violently to* PHILIP.

THOMAS. I say, he shouldn't pull her about like that.

WINDLESHAM. [*skipping back to admire the result.*] Là . . . comme ça.

The costume continues its round; the others are still circling, veering and tacking, while WINDLESHAM *trips admiringly around and about them. It all looks like some dance of modish dervishes.*

PHILIP. [*heartlessly.*] La belle Hélène, Mr. State, is a well-known Parisian cocotte . . . who sets many of the fashions which our wives and daughters afterwards assume.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*scandalised.*] Don't say that, Phil; it's not nice.

PHILIP. Why?

MR. HUXTABLE. I'm sure no ladies are aware of it.

PHILIP. But what can be more appropriate than for the professional charmer to set the pace for the amateur!

WINDLESHAM. [*pausing in the dance.*] Quite la haute cocotterie, of course.

MR. STATE. [*solemnly.*] Do you infer, Mr. Madras, a difference in degree, but not in kind?

PHILIP. [*courteously echoing his tone.*] I do.

MR. STATE. That is a very far-reaching observation, sir.

PHILIP. It is.

THOMAS. Do you know the lady personally, Mr. Windlesham?

WINDLESHAM *turns, with some tag of a costume in his hand, thus unconsciously detaining the occupier.*

WINDLESHAM. Oh no . . . oh, dear me, no. . . . I do assure you. There's nothing gay in Paris for me. Tout à fait au contraire. I was blasé long ago.

MR. STATE. But touching that hat, Mr. Windlesham?

WINDLESHAM. Oh, to be sure. Attendez, Ma'moiselle.

Tiptoeing, he dexterously tilts the straw hat from the elaborate head it is perched on.

WINDLESHAM. It's not a bad story. Sortez.

By this two costumes have glided out. The third follows. STATE, *who has found it hard to keep his eyes off them, knits his brows, and turns to* MR. HUXTABLE.

MR. STATE. Does it strike you, now, that there is something not quite natural in their behaviour?

WINDLESHAM, *caressing the hat, takes up an attitude for his story.*

WINDLESHAM. Well . . . it appears that a while ago out at the Pré Catalan . . . there was Hélène, taking her afternoon cup of buttermilk. What should she see but Madame Erlancourt . . . one of the old guard, she is! . . . in a hat the very twin of hers . . . the very twin. Well . . . you can imagine! Some one had blundered.

MR. STATE. [*absorbed.*] No, I am not with you.

PHILIP. Some spy in the enemy's service had stolen the plans of the hat.

MR. STATE. No . . . Madame What's-her-name might have seen it on her before and copied it.

PHILIP. Mr. State, Hélène does not wear a hat twice.

MR. STATE. My mistake!

WINDLESHAM. So there was a terrible scene. . . .

THOMAS. With Madame . . . ?

WINDLESHAM. [*repudiating any such vulgarity.*] Oh no. Hélène just let fly at her chaperone, she being at hand, so to speak.

MR. STATE. [*dazzled.*] Her what! [*Then with humorous awe.*] No, go on . . . go on . . . I am with you now, I think.

WINDLESHAM. She fetched in out of the Bois the ugliest little gamine she could find . . . put her own hat on its horrid little head . . . sat it at her table and stuffed it with cakes. Then she sent to the kitchens for one of those baskets they bring the fish in. . . . [*He twirls the hat.*] . . . . see! Then she ripped a bit of ribbon and a couple of these [*These being rosettes*] off her pantalettes. . . . .

MR. STATE. [*the Puritan.*] In public?

WINDLESHAM. [*professionally.*] Oh, it can be done. Besides . . . la belle France, you know . . . there is something in the atmosphere! Twisted it round the basket . . . très pratique! And that's what she wore the rest of the afternoon and back to Paris. And it's going to be all the rage.

Having deftly pantomimed this creation of a fashion, he hands the hat with an air to MR. STATE, *who examines it.* PHILIP *is smilingly caustic.*

PHILIP. La Belle Hélène has the audacity of genius, Mr. State. She is also, I am told, thrifty, inclined to religion, a vegetarian, Vichy water her only beverage; in truth she is a credit to her profession . . . and to ours.

MR. STATE *hands back the hat with the solemnest humour.*

MR. STATE. Mr. Windlesham, I am much obliged to you for this illuminating anecdote.

WINDLESHAM. Not at all. Will you see another three? Which shall we have now? [*He dips into his*

list.] Here's a Dinner and Dance . . . and a Grande Tenue . . . and a wrap and pyjamas . . . a Nightie-Night.

MR. STATE. By all means.

WINDLESHAM. They won't be long in changing . . . but one I must just pin on.

MR. STATE. No hurry . . . sir.

He has acquired a new joy in WINDLESHAM, *whom he watches dance away. Then a song is heard from the next room.*

WINDLESHAM. Allons . . . numéro cinq . . . numéro sept . . . numéro dix . . . Ma'moiselle Ollivier . . . vous vous mettrez. . . .

And the door closes.

PHILIP. [*looks at his watch.*] But it's ten past three. We'd better not wait for my father.

They surround the table and sit down.

MR. STATE. Major Thomas, have you my memoranda?

THOMAS. Here.

He hands them to STATE, *who clears his throat, refrains from spitting, and begins the customary American oration.*

MR. STATE. The scheme, gentlemen, for which I desire to purchase the Madras House and add it to the interest of the Burrows enterprise, which I already control, is . . . to put it shortly . . . this. The Burrows provincial scheme . . . you are aware of its purpose . . . goes well enough as far as the shareholding by the local drapery stores is concerned. And it has interested me to discover which aspects of the Burrows scheme suit which cities . . . and why. An absorbing problem in local psychology. But in a certain number of cases the local people will not come in. Yet in Leicester, let us say, or Norwich or Plymouth or Coventry, the unknown and somewhat uninspiring name of Burrows upon an opposition establishment might

cut no ice. But I have a further and I hope not uninteresting reason to put before you gentlemen why it is in these centres that we should look to establish our Madras Houses. . . . New Edition. Is that clear so far?

During this MR. CONSTANTINE MADRAS *has arrived. He turned aside for a moment to the door that the mannequins came from; now he joins the group. A man of sixty and over, to whom this is still the prime of life. Tall, quite dramatically dignified, suave, a little remote; he is one of those to whom life is an art of which they have determined to be master. It is a handsome face, Eastern in type, the long beard only streaked with grey. He does not dress like the ruck of men, because he is not of them. The velvet coat, brick-red tie, shepherd's-plaid trousers, white spats and patent boots, both suit him and express him subtly and well; the mixture of originality and alien tradition which is the man.* PHILIP *is purposely casual in greeting him; he has sighted him first. But* MR. STATE *gets up, impressed. It is part of his creed to recognise greatness; he insists on recognising it.*

PHILIP. Hullo, Father!

MR. STATE. Mr. Madras! Proud to meet you again.

CONSTANTINE. [*graciously, without emotion.*] How do you do, Mr. State?

PHILIP. You know every one, Father. Oh . . . Hippisly Thomas.

CONSTANTINE. [*just as graciously.*] How do you do, sir? [*Then, with a mischievous smile, he pats* HUXTABLE *on the shoulder.*] How are you, my dear Harry?

MR. HUXTABLE *had heard him coming and felt himself turn purple. This was the great meeting after thirty years! He had let it come upon him unawares; purposely let it, for indeed he had not known what to say or do. He had dreaded having*

the inspiration to say or do anything. Now—alas, and thank goodness!—it is too late. He is at a suitable disadvantage. He need only grunt out sulkily. . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. I'm quite well, thank you.

CONSTANTINE, *with one more pat in pardon for the rudeness, goes to his chair.*

MR. STATE. A pleasant trip?

CONSTANTINE. So, so! Don't let me interrupt business. I shall pick up the thread.

MR. STATE. [*serving up a little re-warmed oration.*] I was just proceeding to place on the table-cloth some preliminary details of the scheme that has been elaborating since our meeting last June to consolidate your name and fame in some of the more important cities of England. We had not got far.

He consults his notes. CONSTANTINE *produces from a case a slender cigarette-holder of amber.*

CONSTANTINE. You've some new mannequins, Phil.

PHILIP. Yes.

CONSTANTINE. The tall girl looks well enough. May I smoke?

MR. STATE. Allow me. [*Whipping out his cigar-case.*]

CONSTANTINE. A cigarette, thank you, of my own.

He proceeds to make and light one. MR. STATE *offers cigars generally and then places one to his own hand.*

MR. STATE. I occasionally seek stimulus in a cold cigar. I do not for the moment enter upon the finance of the matter, because I entertain no doubt that . . . possibly with a little adjustment of the proportion of shares and cash . . . that can be fixed.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*in emulation of all this ease and grace.*] I'll ave a cigarette, Phil . . . if you've got one.

PHILIP *has one. And they all make themselves comfortable, while* MR. STATE *continues enjoyably . . .*

MR. STATE. And I know that you are no more the bond-slave of money than I am, Mr. Madras. Any one can make money, if he has capital enough. The little that I have came from lumber and canned peaches. Now there was poetry in lumber. The virgin forest! As a youth I was shy of society . . . but I could sit in silent contemplation of Nature for as much as an hour at a time. Rightly thought of there is poetry in peaches . . . even when they are canned. Do you ask then why I bought that mantle establishment in the city twelve years ago?

PHILIP. [*who is only sorry that some time he must stop.*] I do, Mr. State.

MR. STATE. Because as the years rolled irresistibly on I came to realise that I had become a lonely man . . . and I felt the need of some communion with what Goethe calls, does he not, the Woman Spirit, which can draw us ever upward and on. Well, the Burrows business was in the market . . . and that seemed an appropriate path to the fulfilment of my desire.

CONSTANTINE. The fulfilment . . . ?

MR. STATE. Sir?

CONSTANTINE. The ready-made skirt business has appeased your craving, has it, for the eternal feminine?

MR. STATE. Mr. Madras, that sarcasm is deserved. No, sir, it has not. For the Burrows business, I discover, has no soul. Now a business can no more live the good life without a conscious soul than a human being can. I'm sure I have you with me there, Mr. Huxtable.

Poor MR. HUXTABLE *quite chokes at the suddenness of this summons, but shines his best.*

MR. HUXTABLE. I should say so, quite.

MR. STATE *begins to glow.*

MR. STATE. There was fun, mark you . . . there still is some . . . in making these old back-country stores sit up and take notice . . . telling them: Gentlemen,

come in, or be froze out. That's for their good . . . and for mine. But Burrows can't answer to the call of the Woman's Movement . . . the great Modern Woman's Movement . . . which is upon us . . . though as yet we may not measure its volume. But it is upon us . . . and our choice is to be in it, to do it glad service . . . or to have it flow over us. Let me assure you so. The old-time business of selling a reel of cotton and tinging on the cash machine . . . there's no salvation left in that. Nothing personal, Mr. Huxtable.

MR. HUXTABLE *is ready, this time.*

MR. HUXTABLE. No, no, I'm listening to you . . . I'm not too old to learn.

MR. STATE. Mind . . . Burrows has not been wholly barren soil. Here and there we have sown a seed and made two ideas to spring where but one sprang before. Now in Nottingham . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. I know Nottingham . . . got a shop there?

MR. STATE. [*with wholesome pride.*] In two years the Burrows House in Nottingham has smashed competition. I visited the city last Fall. The notion was our local manager's. Simple. The ladies' department served by gentlemen . . . the gentlemen's by ladies. Always, of course, within the bounds of delicacy. You think there is nothing in that, Mr. Huxtable.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*round-eyed and open-mouthed.*] Oh . . . well . . . !

MR. STATE. But are you a Mean Sensual Man?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*whose knowledge of the French language hardly assists him to this startling translation.*] No . . . I hope not.

MR. STATE. Put yourself in his place. Surrounded by pretty girls . . . good girls, mind you . . . high class . . . pay them well . . . let them live out . . .

pay for their mothers and chaperones if necessary. Surrounded, then, by Gracious Womanhood, does the Sensual Man forget how much money he is spending or does he not? Does he come again? Is it a little oasis in the desert of his business day? Is it a better attraction than Alcohol, or is it not?

PHILIP. [*bitingly.*] Is it?

MR. STATE. Then, sir . . . Audi Alteram Partem. See our Ladies' Fancy Department at its best . . . when Summer Time brings time for sport.

PHILIP. I must certainly do so.

MR. STATE. Athletes every one of em . . . not a man under six foot . . . bronzed, noble fellows! And no flirting allowed . . . no making eyes . . . no pandering to anything depraved. But the Courtesy of Chivalry and the Chivalry of Courtesy proffered by clean-limbed and clean-minded gentlemen to any of the Fair Sex who may step in to buy a shilling sachet or the like. And pay, sir . . . the women come in flocks!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*bereft of breath.*] Is this how you mean to run your Madras Houses?

MR. STATE. With a difference, Mr. Huxtable. I also live and learn. I bought and built up the Burrows enterprise when the Suffrage Question was nearing a solution . . . for I foresaw that with added freedom womanhood's demands upon the resources of our civilisation would surely grow. But even then I saw, too, that political claims were but the narrowest, drabbest aspect of the matter. What now, urbi et orbi, is the Modern Woman's Movement? It is woman expressing herself. How? Upon what roads is she marching? What is her goal? Is it for us to say? No. Nor as yet for her, it may be. Every morning I have placed upon my table not only the newspapers that affect her interests to-day . . . and they pile high . . . but also those of the same day and date of

five and twenty years ago . . . no more than that. But the comparison is instructive. And one thing is certain. Burrows and the ready-made skirt belong to the dead past.

WINDLESHAM, *pins in his mouth, fashion plates under his arm, and the fish-basket hat in his hand, shoots out of the other room.*

WINDLESHAM. Will you have the others in now? [*Then back through the door.*] Allons, Mes'moiselles, si vous plaît. Numéro cinq le premier. [*Then he turns the hat upside down on the table.*] You see they left the handles on. But I don't know if we'd better. A bit outré . . . what?

There sails in now no end of a creation.

WINDLESHAM. [*as he searches for the design.*] Numéro cinq . . . number five.

THOMAS *is much struck.*

THOMAS. I say . . . by Jove!

But it is not meant for this cold searching light which seems to separate from the glittering pink affair the poor, pretty smiling creature exhibiting it, until she looks half-naked. MR. WINDLESHAM'S *aesthetic sense is outraged.*

WINDLESHAM. Mais non, mais non . . . pas en plein jour. C'est pour un petit souper très particulier, n'est-ce pas? Mettez-vous par là dans le . . . dans l'alcove . . . à côté du velours noir. They won't learn English; they simply won't. Lucky the lingo's like second nature to me.

The costume undulates towards the black velvet platform. THOMAS *is lost in admiration.*

THOMAS. That gives her a chance. Damn pretty girl.

PHILIP. [*his eyes twinkling.*] But she'll understand that, Tommy.

THOMAS. [*in good faith.*] She won't mind.

MR. STATE. [*who has been studying the undulations.*] But what eloquence of movement!

PHILIP. Eloquence itself!

MR. WINDLESHAM turns on the frame of lights which bear upon the velvet platform. The vision of female loveliness is now complete.

WINDLESHAM. There . . . that's the coup d'œil.

The vision turns this way and that to show what curves of loveliness there may be. They watch, all but CONSTANTINE, *who has sat silent and indifferent, rolling his second cigarette, which he now smokes serenely. At last* PHILIP'S *voice breaks in, at its coolest, its most ironic.*

PHILIP. And this also is woman expressing herself? Rather an awful thought!

THOMAS. [*in protest.*] Why?

PHILIP. Does it express your view of her, Tommy?

THOMAS. It's damned smart.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*who is examining closely.*] No use to us, of course. We couldn't imitate this under fifteen guineas.

THOMAS. [*with discretion.*] Would it spoil the effect now if you had the shiny stuff making it a bit clearer where the pink silk ends and she begins, so to speak?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*not to be sordid.*] But it's a beautiful thing!

MR. STATE. Yes, Mr. Huxtable, and the question is: Do we accept the gospel of beauty, or do we not?

WINDLESHAM. But the trouble I'll have to prevent some old hag of seventy buying a thing like that . . . you'd never believe.

He turns off the light. The vision becomes once more an expensive dress, with a rather thin and shivering young person half inside it, who is thus unceremoniously got rid of.

WINDLESHAM. Numéro sept.

Another costume.

MR. STATE. Now here again. Green velvet. Is it velvet?

WINDLESHAM. Charmeuse. Promenez, s'il vous plaît.

MR. STATE. And ermine . . . Royal Ermine!

MR. HUXTABLE. Good lord . . . more ribbon!

MR. STATE. And this for the adorning of some Queen of the Salons. You are doubtless acquainted with the novels of the Earl of Beaconsfield, Mr. Philip?

PHILIP. I have been.

MR. STATE. Now might not that costume step into or out of any one of them? A great man. A man of imagination. He brought your country to a viewpoint of Imperial . . . of Oriental splendour from which it has not receded. Yes . . . some one of your statesmen . . . some soldier of Empire will, we may hope, find repose from his cares and fresh ardour for his ambitions there!

WINDLESHAM. Numéro dix.

The last mannequin, attired in dressing-gown and pyjamas, now appears.

PHILIP. Or even here.

MR. STATE. Or even . . . ! No . . . at this point my judgement stands disabled. Still . . . why not be attractive en intimité? Her household motions light and free . . . Wordsworth, I think. Our human nature's daily food . . . an unromantic simile. Why now should it not be bright as well as good?

CONSTANTINE. You are something of a poet yourself, Mr. State.

MR. STATE. I never wrote one in my life, sir.

CONSTANTINE. How many poets would do well to change their scribbling for the living of such an epic as your purchase of the Madras House promises to be!

MR. STATE. [*immensely gratified.*] Sir, I shall be proud to be your successor. But you were for the Old

Régime. It is the middle-class woman of England that I see waiting for me. Literature and journalism have laid the train. Beneath the surface of a work-a-day life her own imagination is now smouldering . . . though too often she still sits at the parlour window of her provincial villa pensively gazing through the laurel bushes . . . as I have seen her on my solitary walks. She too must have her chance to dazzle and conquer. That is every woman's birthright . . . be she duchess in Mayfair . . . or doctor's wife or baker's daughter in the suburbs of Leicester. And remember, gentlemen, that the middle-class woman of England, as of America . . . think of her in bulk . . . is potentially the greatest money-spending machine in the world.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*with a wag of his head; he is more at his ease now.*] Yes . . . her husband's money.

MR. STATE. A sociologist will tell you, sir, that economic freedom is the inevitable sequel to the political freedom that women have now gained. And I suggest to you that any increased demand for spending power which will urge the middle-class husband to resist the financial encroachments of your proletariat . . . for something must be made to . . . may contribute largely to the salvation of your country.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*overwhelmed, as well he may be.*] Oh . . . I beg pardon.

MR. STATE. [*soaring, ever soaring.*] But the seed sown and the soil of their sweet natures tilled . . . what mighty forest, what luxuriant, tropical, scented growth of womanhood may not spring up around? For we live in an ugly world. Look at my vest. Consider your tie, Major Thomas. [*His eye searches for those costumes and finds one.*] But here is living beauty . . . and we want more of it, much, much more! Think of the residential sections of your cities and

contradict me if you can. I mean to help that poor provincial lady to burst through the laurel bushes and dash down the road . . . clad like the Rainbow.

For MR. WINDLESHAM *had detained this one young lady. She has been standing there, the accustomed smile hardly masking a wonder into what peculiar company of milliners she has fallen. But* MAJOR THOMAS, *his attention called to her, now jumps up to offer his chair.*

THOMAS. I say, though . . . allow me.

WINDLESHAM. Oh, thanks no end . . . but they never sit.

MR. STATE. Dear me . . . I had not intended to detain mademoiselle. [*Then, to mend his manners, and as if it were an incantation to that end.*] Bon jour.

The young lady departs, a real smile shaming the unreal.

WINDLESHAM. D'you notice there hasn't been a mode you could sit in to advantage these fifteen years? But with a couch, y'know, we might get a sort of mermaid effect out of some of them.

MR. STATE. I do clean forget they are there. We gave some time and money to elaborating a mechanical moving figure to take the place of . . . a real automaton, in fact. But sometimes it stuck and sometimes it ran away.

THOMAS. And the cost!

PHILIP. [*finely.*] Flesh and blood is always cheaper.

MR. STATE. But it would have provided every Burrows House with a complete series of the ideal figure from youth to age. Do you regret the days of the corset, Mr. Windlesham, may I ask?

WINDLESHAM. Well, I'm not sure I don't. Line's my problem. And . . . oh woman, woman! . . . she'll fuss over her face by the hour . . . but her figure's up

to me. And the embonpoint I have to get away with! All the really nice women seem to eat too much. Sometimes, I tell you, I could cry!

MR. STATE. Did you ever delve into the psychology of the corset? A while ago I had a young historian write Burrows a little monograph on corsets . . . price one shilling. Out of date now . . . for it summed up in their favour. And we made a small museum of them . . . at Southampton, I think . . . but it was not a success. Major Thomas, we must send Mr. Windlesham a copy of that monograph. You will find it suggestive.

WINDLESHAM. Oh, thanks too awfully . . . I'm sure I shall. Send it me to the farm, will you, Thomas? I do my serious reading there, week-ends.

MR. STATE. You have a farm?

WINDLESHAM. Just a toy . . . but thank God for it! I'd be a nervous wreck with my mind on this all the time. Nature's my passion. Can I assist you any further?

PHILIP. See me before you go.

WINDLESHAM. Then it's only au'voir.

And he flutters away. There is a pause as if they had to recollect where they were. It is broken by PHILIP *saying meditatively . . .*

PHILIP. I sometimes wonder, though, what this fruit of all our labours, the well-dressed woman . . . what the creature really would look like to an uncorrupted eye. Costume . . . let it alone . . . may evolve in utility and beauty. A cow-boy, a Swiss guide, an Arab in his burnous! But we deal in fashions . . . in hats too elaborate to stay on, or so simple that they extinguish sight and hearing . . . in shoes as useful and as dignified as stilts are . . . and in skirts that are neither bond nor free. And even fashion may not find its own salvation. Every season we must give it some new tweak that will leave last year's dresses looking dowdy.

What can the result be, then . . . in either utility or beauty ?

MR. STATE. Mr. Philip . . . that opens up a world of thought . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. Don't you be too clever, Phil.

MR. STATE. . . . and recalls to me a project I once entertained for the founding at one of our more conservative universities of a chair of the Philosophy of Fashion. Major Thomas, will you remind me to consider that again ?

MR. HUXTABLE. Talk won't bring dividends . . . that's what I say.

MR. STATE. A fallacy, Mr. Huxtable, if I may so far correct you. Lift your head, broaden your horizon, and you will see, I think, that all human activities are one. And what we men of business should remember is that art, philosophy and religion can and should, in the widest sense of the term, be made to pay. And it's pay or perish, in this world.

MR. HUXTABLE. A pretty frock's a pretty frock. What more is there to it ?

THOMAS. A lot of English women at Ascot, Goodwood, the Eton and Harrow. . . . I'll back it for the finest sight going.

PHILIP. Have you ever seen an Eastern woman walk through the crowd at Claridge's ?

THOMAS. No.

PHILIP. [*forcefully.*] I did, the other day.

CONSTANTINE. Ah !

With one long meditative exhalation he sends a little column of smoke into the air. MR. STATE *turns to him deferentially.*

MR. STATE. But we are boring you, Mr. Madras, I fear. You were Facile Princeps upon all these questions so long ago.

CONSTANTINE *speaks in the smoothest of voices.*

CONSTANTINE. No, I am not bored, Mr. State. Somewhat horrified.

MR. STATE. Why so?

CONSTANTINE. You see . . . I am a Mahommedan . . . and this attitude towards the other sex has become loathsome to me.

This bombshell, so delicately exploded, affects the company very variously. It will be some time before MR. HUXTABLE *grasps its meaning at all.* THOMAS *simply opens his mouth.* MR. STATE *has evidently found a new joy in life.* PHILIP, *to whom it seems no news, merely says in light protest . . .*

PHILIP. My dear father!

MR. STATE. [*as he beams round.*] A real Mahommedan?

CONSTANTINE. I have become a Mahommedan. If you were not, it would be inconvenient to live permanently at Hit . . . a village in Mesopotamia which is my home. Besides, I was converted.

THOMAS. [*having recovered enough breath.*] I didn't know you could become a Mahommedan.

CONSTANTINE. [*with some severity.*] You can become a Christian, sir.

THOMAS. [*a little shocked.*] Ah . . . not quite the same thing.

MR. STATE. [*who feels that he really is re-discovering the old world.*] But how very interesting! To a broad-minded man . . . how extraordinarily interesting! Was it a sudden conversion?

CONSTANTINE. No. . . . I had been searching for a religion . . . a common need in these times . . . and this is a very fine one, Mr. State.

MR. STATE. Is it? I must look it up. The Koran! Yes, I've never read the Koran . . . an oversight.

He makes a mental note. And slowly, slowly the full iniquity of it has sunk into MR. HUXTABLE.

His face has gone from red to white and back again to red. He becomes articulate and vehement. He thumps the table.

MR. HUXTABLE. And what about Amelia?

MR. STATE. [*with conciliatory calm.*] Who is Amelia?

PHILIP. Afterwards, Uncle.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*thumping again.*] What about your wife? No, I won't be quiet, Phil! It's illegal.

CONSTANTINE. [*with a half-cold, half-kindly eye on him.*] Harry . . . I shall hate to see you make yourself ridiculous.

Only this was needed.

MR. HUXTABLE. Who cares if I'm ridiculous? I've not spoken to you for thirty years . . . have I? That is . . . I've not taken more notice of you than I could help. And I come here to-day full of forgiveness . . . and curiosity . . . to see what you're really like now . . . and whether I've changed my mind . . . or whether I never really felt all that about you at all . . . and damned if you don't go and put up a fresh game on me! What about Amelia? Religion this time! Mahommedan, indeed . . . at your age! Can't you ever settle down? I beg your pardon, Mr. State. All right, Phil, afterwards! I've not done . . . but you're quite right . . . afterwards.

The gust over, MR. STATE, *who is a little be-blown by it at such close quarters, says, partly with a peace-making intention, partly in curiosity . . .*

MR. STATE. But do you indulge in a harem?

MR. HUXTABLE *is on his feet, righteously strepitant.*

MR. HUXTABLE. If you insult my sister by answering that question . . . !

With a look and a gesture CONSTANTINE *can silence him. Then with the coldest dignity he replies . . .*

CONSTANTINE. My household, sir, is that of the

ordinary Eastern gentleman of my position. We do not speak of our women in public.

MR. STATE. I'm sure I beg your pardon.

CONSTANTINE. Not at all. It is five years since I definitely retired from business and decided to consummate my affection for the East by settling down there. This final visit to Europe . . . though partly to see you, Mr. State . . . was to confirm my judgement in the matter.

MR. STATE. Has it ?

CONSTANTINE. It has. I was always out of place amongst you. I have been reproached with scandalous conduct. . . . [*A slight stir from* MR. HUXTABLE.] Hush, Harry . . . hush ! I do not altogether admit . . . and I never could see my way to amend it. It is therefore some slight satisfaction to me to discover now . . . with a stranger's eye . . . that Europe in its attitude towards women is mad.

MR. STATE. Mad !

CONSTANTINE. Mad.

THOMAS. [*who is all ears.*] I say !

CONSTANTINE. You possibly agree with me, Major Thomas.

THOMAS. [*much taken aback.*] No . . . I don't think so.

CONSTANTINE. Many men do, but . . . poor fellows ! . . . they dare not say so. For instance, Mr. State, what can be said of a community in which five men of ability and dignity are met together to traffic in . . . what was the number of that aphrodisiac that so particularly attracted Major Thomas ?

THOMAS *is shocked even to violence.*

THOMAS. No . . . really . . . I protest . . . !

MR. STATE. [*utterly calm.*] Easy, Major Thomas. Let us consider the accusation philosophically. [*Then with the sweetest smile.*] Surely that is a gross construction

to put on the instinct of every beautiful woman to adorn herself.

CONSTANTINE. Please don't mistake me. I delight in pretty women prettily adorned. To come home after a day's work to the welcome of one's women folk . . . to find them unharassed by notions of business or politics . . . ready to refresh one's spirit by attuning it to a sweeter, more emotional side of life . . .

THOMAS. [*making hearty atonement.*] Ah, quite so . . . quite so.

CONSTANTINE. I thought you would agree with me, Major Thomas. That is the Mahommedan gentleman's domestic ideal.

THOMAS. [*brought up short.*] Is it?

CONSTANTINE. But the intention of a costume is everything . . . and that one's intention was pretty clear. If a husband found his wife wearing it . . .

THOMAS. Well . . . that was a going-out dress.

PHILIP. [*greatly enjoying this contest.*] Oh . . . Tommy! Tommy!

THOMAS. [*rounding for a moment upon* PHILIP.] What's the matter? I tell you . . . if a woman always kept herself smart and attractive at home a man would have no excuse for gadding about after other women.

MR. HUXTABLE *joins in the fray, suddenly, snappily.*

MR. HUXTABLE. She sits looking after his children. What more does he want of her?

CONSTANTINE. Harry, now, is a born husband, Major Thomas.

MR. HUXTABLE. I'm not a born libertine, I hope.

THOMAS. Oh . . . libertine be dashed!

MR. STATE. [*pacifically.*] Gentlemen, gentlemen . . . these are abstract propositions.

MR. HUXTABLE. Gadding after another man's wife, perhaps! Though I don't think you ever did that,

Constantine . . . I'll do you justice . . . I don't think you ever did.

PHILIP. [*with intense mischief.*] Oh, Tommy, Tommy . . . can you say the same ?

THOMAS *is really flabbergasted at the indecency.*

THOMAS. Phil, that ain't nice . . . that ain't kind. And I wasn't thinking of that, and you know I wasn't. And . . . we ain't all so unattractive to women as you are.

MR. STATE *loses himself in enjoyment of this repartee.*

MR. STATE. Ah . . . sour grapes, Mr. Philip. We mustn't be personal . . . but is it sour grapes ?

PHILIP. [*very coolly on his defence.*] Thank you, Tommy . . . I can do all the attracting I want to do.

That is the end of that little breeze, and CONSTANTINE'S *voice completes the quieting.*

CONSTANTINE. My son is a cold-blooded egotist. His way with a woman is to coax her on to the intellectual plane, where he thinks he can better her. My sympathies are with Major Thomas. I also am as susceptible as Nature means a man to be . . . and as all women must wish him to be. And I referred to these going-out dresses because, candidly, I found myself obliged to leave a country where women are let loose with money to spend and time to waste. Where the law and what is called chivalry protect them in their most shameless provocations . . . where they flaunt and flout you in the very streets, proud if they see the busmen wink . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. Not busmen ! [*But he is only gently deprecating now.*]

CONSTANTINE. Let him but veil his leering, my dear Harry, and the lousiest beggar's tribute is but one more coin in the pocket of their shame.

To MR. STATE *this might be a physical flick in the*

face. But MR. HUXTABLE *looks round and nods solemnly and thoughtfully.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Now there's no need to put it that way . . . and I'd deny it any other time. But I've been thinking a bit lately . . . and the things you think of once you start to think! And there's something in that. [*But with great chivalry.*] Only they don't know they do it. They don't know they do it. [*Then a doubt occurring.*] D'you think they know they do it, Phil?

PHILIP. Some of them may suspect, Uncle.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*his faith unspoiled.*] No, what I say is it's instinct . . . and we've just got to be as nice-minded about it as we can. There was Julia, this summer at Weymouth . . . that's one of my daughters. Bought herself a dress . . . not one of the Numero sort, of course . . . but very pretty . . . orange colour, it was . . . stripes. But you could see it a mile off on the parade . . . and her sisters all with their noses out of joint. I said to myself . . . instinct.

Suddenly MR. STATE *rescues the discussion.*

MR. STATE. Yes, sir . . . the noblest instinct of all . . . the instinct to perpetuate our race. Let us take high ground in this matter, gentlemen.

CONSTANTINE. [*unstirred.*] The very highest, Mr. State. If you think that to turn Weymouth for a month a year into a cockpit of haphazard love-making . . . and baulked love-making at that, most of it . . . with the various consequences this entails, is the best way of perpetuating your race . . . well, I disagree with you . . . but it's a point of view. What I ask now is why Major Thomas and myself . . . already perhaps in a creditable state of marital perpetuation . . . should have our busy London lives obsessed by . . . What is this thing?

PHILIP. La belle Hélène's new hat, Father.

CONSTANTINE. Now, that may be ugly . . . I hope I never made anything quite so ugly myself . . . but it's attractive.

PHILIP. [*with a wry face.*] No, Father.

CONSTANTINE. Isn't it, Major Thomas ?

THOMAS. [*honestly.*] Well . . . it makes you look at em when you might not otherwise.

CONSTANTINE. As I say . . . it's provocative. Its intention is that the world's work shall not be done while it's about. And when it's about I honestly confess again I cannot do my share. A terrible thing to be constantly conscious of women ! They have their uses . . . as you so happily phrased it, Mr. State . . . their perpetual use . . . and the world's interest is best served by keeping them strictly to it. For are these provocative ladies [*he fingers the hat again*] so remarkable for perpetuation nowadays ?

Once more MR. STATE *bursts in ; this time with heart-broken eloquence.*

MR. STATE. I can't bear this, sir . . . I can't bear to have you take such a view of life. It's reactionary . . . you're on the wrong tack . . . oh, believe me ! Come back to us, sir. You gave us joy and pleasure . . . can we do without such pleasure and such joy ? But find yourself once more among the Loveliness you made more Lovely and you'll change your mind. How did that story of the Duchess end ? When, on the appointed night, attired in her Madras Creation she swept into the Ball-room with a frou-frou of silk skirt . . . wafting perfume as she came . . . while her younger rivals paled before the splendour of her beauty, and every man in the room . . . young and old . . . struggled for a glimpse . . . for one word from her . . . one look. [*Once again he starts to soar.*] A ball-room, sir . . . one of the sweetest sights in the world ! Where bright the lamps shine o'er Fair Women and Brave Men.

Music arises with its-Voluptuous Swell. Soft eyes look Love to eyes which speak again. And all goes merry as a Marriage Bell! Byron, gentlemen . . . taught me at my mother's knee. The poet of Love and Liberty . . . read in every school in America!

At the end of this recitation, which MR. HUXTABLE *barely refrains from applauding,* CONSTANTINE *goes coolly on.*

CONSTANTINE. Yes, Mr. State, that is my case . . . and you plead it admirably. The whole of our upper class life, which every one with a say in the government of the country must now lead . . . is run as a ball-room is run. Men swaggering before women . . . the women ogling the men. Once a lad did have some preliminary training in manliness. But now from the very start . . .! And in your own progressive country . . . mixed education . . . oh, my dear sir . . . mixed education!

MR. STATE. A softening influence.

CONSTANTINE. [*unexpectedly.*] Of course it is. And what has all education sunk to nowadays? To book-learning. Because woman's a dab at that . . though it's of quite secondary importance to a man.

THOMAS. [*feelingly.*] That's so.

CONSTANTINE. And to the exercise of moral influence . . . of woman's morality . . . the pettiest code ever framed. And now, with a new divorce law, you've given them, if you please, a legal title to jealousy. Wait a few years till their purses are fuller . . . and, by God, gentlemen, they'll make you smart for that.

PHILIP. Yes, I think they will.

CONSTANTINE. And at every university . . . what with women students, married professors and their family luncheons . . .! Heavens above us . . . no respectable woman under sixty should be let within ten miles of any university. From seventeen to thirty-four . . . these are the years a man should

consecrate to the acquiring of political virtue. Wherever he turns is he to be distracted, provoked, tantalised by the barefaced presence of women? How's he to keep a clear brain for the larger issues of life? Why do you soldiers, Major Thomas, volunteer with such alacrity for foreign service?

THOMAS. [*with a jump.*] Good Lord . . . I never thought of that.

CONSTANTINE. What's the result? We view all our problems to-day . . . political, economic, religious, through the cloudy spectacles of womanly emotion . . . which has its place . . . but not, heaven help us, in the world of affairs. What wonder, then, that your labouring men, who can keep their womenkind to child-bearing and housework and gossip within doors . . . what wonder if they get the government from you? You, at your luncheon and dinner tables, the news in your newspapers dressed up as fiction, your statesmen and soldiers pursued at their work to fill picture pages, your week-ends where women out-gamble you at cards, play up to you at sport, out-do you in the ribaldry of the smoking-room! An effete empire is yours, gentlemen . . . and the barbarian with his pick and shovel and his man's capacities is over its frontiers already. And what has been your defence against him? Soft talk and scoldings . . . coaxings and hysterics . . . and pretty dialectic trickery that your women have applauded. How they'll despise you soon for it! You four unfortunates might own the truth just for once . . . you needn't tell your wives. . . .

MR. STATE. I am not married.

CONSTANTINE. I might have known that.

MR. STATE. [*a little astonished.*] But no matter.

CONSTANTINE. [*with full appreciation of what he says.*] Women haven't morals or intellect in our sense of the words. Shut them away from public life and public

exhibition. It's degrading to compete with them, or for them. I fear, I greatly fear it is too late . . . but oh, my dear sentimental Sir [*he addresses the pained though admiring* MR. STATE], replant the laurel bushes, and thickly . . . and we might yet recover strength to hold our place in the world.

Except PHILIP, *who sits detached and attentive, they are all rather depressed by this judgement upon them.* THOMAS *recovers sufficiently to ask . . .*

THOMAS. Are you advocating polygamy in England?

CONSTANTINE. That would be a part of the solution.

THOMAS. A pretty shocking idea, you know. [*Then with some hopeful interest.*] And is it practical?

CONSTANTINE. I did not foresee even so much reform in my lifetime . . . so I left for the East.

PHILIP. [*finely.*] You did quite right, Father. Why don't your many unavowed disciples do the same?

CONSTANTINE *is ready for him.*

CONSTANTINE. Now think, Philip, think! See things as they are and not as you wish them to be. Who, Mr. State, in your country, took most kindly to Mormonism, for all its vulgarity? Not men. Think of the women who'd change the West for the East and be off with me to-morrow.

MR. HUXTABLE *wakes at last from stupefaction to say with tremendous emphasis. . . .*

MR. HUXTABLE. Never.

CONSTANTINE. Wrong, Harry!

MR. HUXTABLE. No, I'm not wrong just because you say so! You ought to listen to me a bit sometimes. I always listened to you.

CONSTANTINE. Bless your quick temper!

Who could resist CONSTANTINE's *smile? Not* HARRY HUXTABLE.

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh . . . go on . . . tell me why I'm wrong . . . I daresay I am.

CONSTANTINE. Harry, you have six daughters, neither married, nor now with much hope to be. Even if you like that . . . do they? You'd better have drowned them at birth.

MR. HUXTABLE. You must have your joke, mustn't you?

CONSTANTINE. How much pleasanter then for you . . . and how much better for them . . . if you could still find a man ready for some small consideration to marry the lot!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*with intense delight.*] Now if I was to tell my wife that she wouldn't see the umour of it.

CONSTANTINE. The woman emancipator's last ditch, Mr. State, is the trust that women . . . their eyes open . . . will side with him. Make no mistake. This is a serious question to them . . . of health and happiness . . . if not of bread and butter. Rule out our customers here, who are kept women nearly every one of them. . . . .

MR. STATE. [*in some alarm.*] You don't say.

CONSTANTINE. [*gently lifting him from the little trap.*] Kept by their husbands. Or somehow kept . . . in return for what they are, not for what they do . . . by Society.

MR. STATE. Culture demands a leisure class, you know.

CONSTANTINE. But, as I remember, we used to employ, Harry, between us . . . what? . . . two or three hundred free and independent women . . . making clothes for the others, the ladies . . . selling them finery. As free as you like . . . free to go . . . free to starve. Did they rejoice in that freedom to earn their living by ruining their health and stifling their instincts? Answer me, Harry, you monster of good-natured wickedness.

MR. HUXTABLE. What's that?

CONSTANTINE. You keep an industrial seraglio.

MR. HUXTABLE. A what!

CONSTANTINE. What is your Roberts and Huxtable but a harem of industry? Yet the sight of it would sicken with horror a good Mahommedan. You buy these girls in the open market . . . you keep them under lock and key. . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. I do?

CONSTANTINE. Yes, Harry, and no harm's done yet. [*Then his voice sinks to the utmost seriousness.*] But you coin your profits out of them by putting on exhibition for ten hours a day their good looks, their good manners . . . hire it out to any stranger to hold as cheap for a few minutes as his good manners may allow. And then . . . then! . . . once you've worn them out you turn them out . . . forget their very names . . . wouldn't know their faces if you met them selling matches at your door. For such treatment of potential motherhood my Prophet condemns a man to Hell.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*breathless with amazement.*] Well, I never did in all my born days! They can marry respectably, can't they? We like em to marry.

PHILIP. Yes, Uncle . . . I went into that question with Miss Yates and the Brigstocks this morning.

CONSTANTINE. [*completing his case.*] So I ask you . . . what is to happen to you as a nation? What of your future generations? Between the well-kept women you flatter and æstheticise till they won't give you children and the women you let labour till they can't give you children. . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. [*half humorously sulky.*] Miss Yates has obliged us anyhow.

PHILIP. [*quickly capping him.*] And we're going to dismiss her.

MR. HUXTABLE *flashes again into protestation.*

MR. HUXTABLE. What else can we do? But I said

you weren't to be hard on the girl. And I won't be upset like this. I like to take things as I find em . . . that is as I used to find em . . . before there was any of these ideas going around . . . and I'm sure we were happier. Stifling their instincts . . . it's a horrid way to talk. And I don't believe it. I could send for every girl in the shop and not one of em would hint at it to me. [*He has triumphed with himself so far; but his newborn intellectual conscience brings him down.*] Not that that proves anything, does it? I'm a fool. It's a beastly world. But I don't make it so, do I?

PHILIP. Who does?

MR. HUXTABLE. Other people. [PHILIP's *eye is on him.*] Oh, I see it coming. You're going to say we're all the other people or something. I'm getting up to you.

CONSTANTINE. [*very carefully.*] What is this about a Miss Yates?

PHILIP. A little bother down at Peckham. I'll tell you about it afterwards.

CONSTANTINE. No . . . no need.

Something in the tone of this last makes PHILIP *look up quickly. But* MR. STATE, *with a sudden thought, has first dived for his watch and then at the sight of it gets up from the table.*

MR. STATE. Gentlemen, are you aware of the time? I may mention that I have a City appointment at four o'clock.

CONSTANTINE. [*polite but leisurely.*] Are we detaining you, Mr. State? Not universal or compulsory polygamy, Major Thomas. I should never advocate that. For one thing the distribution of the sexes forbids it. But its recognition in principle is a logical outcome of the aristocratic method of government. And that's the only ultimate method . . . all others are interim plans for sifting out aristocracies. The community of the future

will be wise, I think, to specialise its functions, so that women may find, if they so wish, intellectual companions like my son . . . who will then be free to dedicate their emotions to municipal politics. There will still be single-hearted men like Harry, content with old-fashioned domesticity. There will be poets like you, Mr. State, to dream about women and to dress them . . . their bodies in silks and their virtues in phrases. But there must also be such men as Major Thomas and myself. . . .

THOMAS *rises, yet again, to this piece of chaff.*

THOMAS. No, no, I'm not like that . . . not in the least. Don't drag me in.

MR. STATE. As stimulating a conversation as I remember. A little hard to follow at times . . . but worth the sacrifice of any mere business talk.

CONSTANTINE *takes the hint graciously and is apt for business at once.*

CONSTANTINE. My fault! Shall we agree, Mr. State, to accept as much of your offer as you have no intention of altering? We are dealing for both the shops?

MR. STATE. Yes. What are we proposing to knock off their valuation, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. Eight thousand six hundred.

CONSTANTINE. Phil, what were we prepared to come down?

PHILIP. Nine thousand.

CONSTANTINE. A very creditable margin. Your offer is accepted, Mr. State.

MR. STATE *feels he must really play up to such magnificent conducting of business.*

MR. STATE. Sir, I should prefer to knock you down only eight thousand.

CONSTANTINE. [*keeping the advantage.*] Isn't that rather too romantic of you, Mr. State?

THOMAS. But the conditions?

CONSTANTINE. We accept your conditions. If they

won't work you'll be only too anxious to alter them. So the business is done.

MR. HUXTABLE'S *eyes are wide.*

MR. HUXTABLE. But look here.

PHILIP. Uncle Harry has something to say. . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. [*assertively.*] Yes.

CONSTANTINE. Something different to say, Harry ?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*after thinking it over.*] No.

So CONSTANTINE *returns happily to his subject.*

CONSTANTINE. What interests me about this Woman Question . . . now that I've settled my personal share in it . . . is to wonder how Europe, hampered by such an unsolved problem, can hope to stand up against the Oriental revival.

THOMAS. Ah, there've been some newspaper articles about that lately.

CONSTANTINE. Doubtless. It has been intellectual currency for a good many years. Up from the Persian Gulf, now, to where I live we could grow enough wheat to feed the British Empire. Life there is simple and spacious . . . the air is not breathed out. All we want is a happy, hardy race of men . . . and under a government that can profit by your scientific achievements and not be seduced by your social and political follies we shall soon beget it. But you Europeans ! Is this the symbol under which you are facing the future ? [*He has found again and lifts up la belle Hélène's new hat.*] A cap of slavery ! You are idolaters of women . . . and they are the slaves of your idolatry.

MR. STATE. [*with glowing admiration.*] Mr. Madras, I am proud to have met you again. My coat ? Thank you, Mr. Philip. I must now prepare to consider the intricacies of a new system of country house sanitation I am about to finance. No poetry there, I fear.

CONSTANTINE. Sanitation ? Your great American science . . . by which you foster your conglomerate

millions in health . . . with folly enough in their heads to provide for the needful catastrophe when you become overcrowded.

MR. STATE. Admirable! I dispute its truth. But how stimulating! Good-bye, sir. Ah, if you'd only travel West instead of East we'd find you audiences. A lecture tour . . . why not? Good-day, Mr. Huxtable. Till to-morrow, Major Thomas. No, Mr. Philip, I can find my way. What a mind . . . what an imagination! America could have given it scope. . . .

PHILIP. Your car's at the George Street entrance, I expect. . . .

MR. STATE *is off for his next deal.* PHILIP *having civilly taken him past the door comes back.* CONSTANTINE *is keeping half a friendly eye on* HUXTABLE, *who fidgets under it.* THOMAS *takes breath and expounds a grievance.*

THOMAS. That's how he does business . . . and leaves us all the real work. I shall take the papers home. The four-thirty gets me indoors by a quarter to six. Time for a cup of tea! Phil, have you got China tea?

PHILIP. Downstairs.

MR. HUXTABLE. I must be getting back.

CONSTANTINE. Running away from me, Harry?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*in frank amused confession.*] Yes . . . I was. Habit, y'know . . . habit.

CONSTANTINE. [*with the most friendly condescension.*] I'll go with you . . . part of the way. How do you go?

MR. HUXTABLE. On a bus.

CONSTANTINE. We'll go together . . . on a bus. D'you remember when the new shop opened how we loved to ride past and look at it . . . from the top of the bus?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*desperately cunning.*] Well . . . they won't see me. We don't close till seven.

CONSTANTINE'S *face sours.*

CONSTANTINE. No, to be sure. Phil, I shan't be with you for dinner, I'm afraid.

PHILIP. Oh, that reminds me . . . Mother's coming. You know the tea-room, Tommy?

THOMAS. [*all tact.*] Oh, quite!

PHILIP. Straight downstairs, first to the left and the second passage. I'll follow.

THOMAS *departs.* CONSTANTINE *says indifferently . . .*

CONSTANTINE. After dinner, then.

PHILIP. But you don't mind?

CONSTANTINE. Not at all.

There stands MR. HUXTABLE, *first on one foot and then on the other, still desperately nervous.* CONSTANTINE *smiling at him.* PHILIP *cannot resist it. He says . . .*

PHILIP. Now's your chance, Uncle. Stand up for Denmark Hill.

And is off. CONSTANTINE *still smiles. Poor* MR. HUXTABLE *makes a desperate effort to do the proper thing by this reprobate. He forms his face into a frown. It's no use; an answering smile will come. He surrenders.*

MR. HUXTABLE. All right! Who cares? Never mind Amelia!

CONSTANTINE. No . . . at least the past is past.

MR. HUXTABLE. Still . . . what else has a chap got to think of?

CONSTANTINE. That's why you look so old.

MR. HUXTABLE. Do I?

CONSTANTINE. What age are you? I forget.

MR. HUXTABLE. Sixty-three.

The two sit down together.

CONSTANTINE. I'm your senior. You should come and stay with me for a little at Hit . . . not far from Hillel . . . Hillel is Babylon, Harry.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*curious.*] What's it like there ?

CONSTANTINE. The house is white and there are palm trees about it . . . and not far off flows the Euphrates.

MR. HUXTABLE. Just like in the Bible. [*His face is wistful.*] Constantine.

CONSTANTINE. Yes ?

MR. HUXTABLE. You've said odder things this afternoon than I've ever heard you say before.

CONSTANTINE. Time was when you wouldn't listen, Harry.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*wondering.*] And I haven't really minded em. It's the first time I've ever seemed to understand you . . . and p'raps that's as well for me.

CONSTANTINE. [*encouragingly.*] Oh . . . why ?

MR. HUXTABLE. Because . . . d'you think it's only not being very clever keeps us . . . straight ?

CONSTANTINE. Has it kept you happy ?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*impatient at the petty word.*] Any one can be happy. What worries me is having got to my age and only just beginning to understand anything at all. And you can't learn it out of books, old man. Books don't tell you the truth . . . at least not any I can find. I wonder now, if I'd been a bit of a dog like you . . . ? But there it is . . . you can't do things that aren't in you to do. And what's more, don't you go to think I'd have done them if I could . . . knowing them to be wrong. [*Then comes a discovery.*] But I was always a bit jealous of you, Constantine, that's the truth . . . for you seemed to get the best of everything . . . and I know people couldn't help being fond of you . . . for I was fond of you myself, whatever you did. That was odd to start with. And now here we are, both of us old chaps. . . . .

CONSTANTINE. [*as he throws back his head.*] I am not old.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*with sudden misgiving.*] You don't repent, do you?

CONSTANTINE. What of?

MR. HUXTABLE. Katherine said this morning that you might have . . . but I wasn't afraid of that. But when I think how, ever since I've known you, you've had us all on the jump . . . and the games you've played . . . why, of course you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Still . . . well . . . it's like the only time I went abroad. I was sick going . . . I was orribly uncomfortable . . . I ated the cooking . . . I was sick coming back. But I wouldn't have missed it. . . .!

CONSTANTINE. [*in affectionate good-fellowship.*] Come to Arabia, Harry.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*humorously pathetic about it.*] Don't you make game of me. My time's over. What have I done with it now? Married. Brought up a family. Been master to a few hundred girls and fellows who never really cared a bit for me. I've been made a convenience of . . . that's my life. That's where I envy you. You have had your own way . . . and, for all the trouble of it, it must have been exciting . . . and you don't look now as if you'd be damned for it either.

CONSTANTINE. [*in gentlemanly defiance.*] I shan't be.

MR. HUXTABLE shakes a fist, somewhat, though unconsciously, in the direction of the ceiling.

MR. HUXTABLE. Well . . . that's not fair, and I don't care who hears me say so.

CONSTANTINE. Life isn't fair, dear Harry. And if it were it wouldn't be life.

As they start, MR. HUXTABLE returns to his mundane responsible self.

MR. HUXTABLE. But you know, old man . . . it's all very well having theories and being able to talk . . . still, you did treat Amelia pretty badly . . . and those

other ones too . . . say what you like! Let go my arm!

CONSTANTINE. Why?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*his scruples less strong than the soft touch of* CONSTANTINE'S *hand.*] Well . . . are you really going away for good this time?

CONSTANTINE. To-morrow.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*beaming on him.*] Then come on home and have a talk to mother and the girls.

MAJOR THOMAS *comes back, looking about him.*

THOMAS. Excuse me . . . I left my hat.

CONSTANTINE. Dare you, Harry, dare you?

MR. HUXTABLE. Well . . . you must mind what you say, of course. But . . . I would like to have us all thinking a bit differently of you when you're gone.

CONSTANTINE. Ah . . . they'll not dare do that, I fear.

PHILIP *comes back too.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Phil . . . your father's coming home to see your aunt.

PHILIP. [*after one gasp at the prospect.*] Good.

CONSTANTINE. I'll be with you by nine, Phil.

MR. HUXTABLE'S *dare-devil heart fails once more.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Don't be too friendly through the shop, though.

PHILIP. And Uncle Harry, by the way, can tell you all about that Miss Yates affair. And your advice may be useful.

CONSTANTINE. He shall have it.

Off they go.

THOMAS. [*still searching.*] Where the devil did I put . . . I shall miss that four-thirty.

PHILIP. If you do . . . take my father's place at dinner, won't you?

THOMAS *stops and looks at him aggrievedly.*

THOMAS. Phil, stop chaffing me . . .

PHILIP. It's evident I need more light on the great Woman Question. What do my mother and Jessica really think about such men as you and my father?

He picks up some papers and sits to them at the table.

THOMAS. . . . or you'll aggravate me into behaving rashly. Oh . . . here. [*He has found his hat, and he slams it on.*]

PHILIP. With Jessica?

THOMAS. [*with ferocious gallantry.*] Yes . . . a damned attractive woman.

PHILIP. Well, after all . . . as an abstract proposition, Tommy . . . polyandry is as much Nature's way, in certain of her moods, as the other. We ought to have made that point with the gentle Mahommedan.

THOMAS. [*after vainly considering this for a moment.*] I'd like to see you in love . . . it'd serve you right.

Suddenly PHILIP *drops his mocking tone.*

PHILIP. But what do we get out of it, I ask . . . we slow-breeding, civilised folk . . . out of love-making and romance . . . beauty of women and its setting in art and culture? We pay pretty dear for it. What does it profit us?

THOMAS. Damned if I know.

PHILIP. Trot along, then, or you will miss your train.

THOMAS *trots along.* PHILIP *gets desperately to loathed business.*

ACT IV

PHILIP, *his mother, and* JESSICA *are sitting after dinner round the drawing-room fire in Dorset Square.* JESSICA, *rather, is away upon the bench of her long, black piano, sorting bound books of music, and the firelight hardly reaches her. But it flickers over* MRS. MADRAS, *and though it marks more deeply the little bitter lines on her face, it leaves a glow there in recompense. She sits, poor anxious old lady, gazing not into the fire, but at the shining copper fender, her hands on her lap as usual. Every now and then she lifts her head to listen.* PHILIP *is comfortable upon the sofa opposite; he is smoking and is deep besides in some weighty volume.*

It is a restful room. The walls are grey, the paint is a darker grey. The curtains to the two long windows are of the gentlest pink brocade; the lights that hang on plain little brackets from the walls are a soft pink, too; and no other colour strikes you, but the maziness of some Persian rugs on the floor and the mellowed brilliancy of a few minor Edwardian masters of the little picture on the walls. There is no more furniture than there need be; there is no more light than there need be; yet it is not empty or dreary. There is just nothing to jar, nothing to prevent a sensitive soul finding peace there.

The parlour maid comes in; she is dressed in grey, too, capless, some black ribbons about her. (One begins to fear that JESSICA'S *home inclines a little to the*

precious !) She brings letters, one for JESSICA, *two for* PHILIP, *and departs.*

PHILIP. Last post.

JESSICA. Half-past nine. I suppose your father does mean to come.

PHILIP. He said so.

MRS. MADRAS. Is your letter interesting, Jessica ?

JESSICA. A receipt.

MRS. MADRAS. Do you run bills ?

JESSICA. Lots.

MRS. MADRAS. Is that wise ?

JESSICA. The tradesmen prefer it.

With that she walks to her writing-table. JESSICA'S *manner to her mother-in-law is over-courteous, an unkind weapon against which the old lady, but half conscious of it, is quite defenceless.* PHILIP *has opened his second letter and whistles at its contents a bar of a tune that is in his head*

JESSICA. What's the matter, Phil ? [*To emphasise his feelings he performs a second bar with variations.*] As bad as that ? [*For final comment he brings the matter to a full close on one expressive note and puts the letter away.* JESSICA *flicks at him amusedly.*]

MRS. MADRAS. How absurd ! You can't tell what he means.

JESSICA. No.

With forced patience she wanders back to her piano.

MRS. MADRAS. You might play us something, Jessica . . . just to pass the time.

Unobserved, JESSICA *casts her eyes up to the ceiling.*

JESSICA. What will you have ?

MRS. MADRAS. I am sure you play all the latest things.

JESSICA. I'm afraid you don't really like my playing.

MRS. MADRAS. I do think it's a little professional. I prefer something softer.

JESSICA *leaves the piano.*

JESSICA. We are giving you a dull evening.

MRS. MADRAS. [*with that suddenness which seems to characterise the* HUXTABLE *family.*] Why do you never call me Mother, Jessica?

JESSICA. Do I not?

MRS. MADRAS. [*resenting prevarication.*] You know you don't.

JESSICA. I suppose I don't think of you . . . precisely so.

MRS. MADRAS. What has that to do with it?

JESSICA. [*more coldly courteous than ever.*] Nothing . . . Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. That's not a very nice manner of giving way, either, is it?

JESSICA. [*on the edge of an outburst.*] Isn't it sufficiently childish?

MRS. MADRAS. [*parading a double injury.*] I don't know what you mean. It's easy to be too clever for me, Jessica. Haven't I a right to respect and affection from you? When an old woman has lost her husband . . . or worse . . . if she's to lose her children, too, what has she left?

The parlour maid announces " MR. CONSTANTINE MADRAS." *There stands* CONSTANTINE *in the bright light of the hall, more dramatically dignified than ever. As he comes in, though, it seems as if there was the slightest strain in his charming manners. He has not changed his clothes for the evening. He goes straight to* JESSICA, *and it seems that he has a curious soft way of shaking hands with women.*

CONSTANTINE. How do you do, Jessica? I find you looking beautiful.

JESSICA *acknowledges the compliment with a little disdainful bend of the head and leaves him; then, with a glance at* PHILIP, *leaves the room.* CONSTANTINE

comes towards his wife. She does not look up, but her face wrinkles pathetically. So he speaks at last.

CONSTANTINE. Well, Amelia?

For MRS. MADRAS *it must be resentment or tears. Resentment comes first.*

MRS. MADRAS. Is that the way to speak to me after thirty years?

CONSTANTINE. [*amicably.*] Perhaps it isn't. But the English language is poor in greetings.

PHILIP, *nodding to his father, has edged to the door and now edges out of it.*

CONSTANTINE. They leave us alone in the firelight. We might be an engaged couple.

She stays silent, distressfully avoiding his eye. He takes a chair and sits by her. He would say (*as* JESSICA *no doubt would say of herself*) *that he speaks kindly to her.*

CONSTANTINE. Well, Amelia? I beg your pardon. I repeat myself and you dislike the phrase. Don't cry, dear Amelia . . . unless, of course, you want to cry. Cry, then, and, when you've finished crying . . . there's no hurry . . . you shall tell me why you wished to see me . . . and run the risk of upsetting yourself like this.

MRS. MADRAS. [*dabbing her eyes.*] I don't often cry. I don't often get a chance.

CONSTANTINE. I fear that is only one way of saying you miss me.

The handkerchief is put away and she faces him.

MRS. MADRAS. Are you really going back to that country to-morrow?

CONSTANTINE. To-morrow morning.

MRS. MADRAS. For good?

CONSTANTINE. [*with thanksgiving.*] For ever.

MRS. MADRAS [*desperately resolute.*] Will you take me with you?

CONSTANTINE *needs just a moment to recover.*

CONSTANTINE. No, Amelia, I will not.

MRS. MADRAS. [*reacting a little hysterically*]. I'm sure I don't want to go and I'm sure I never meant to ask you. But you haven't changed a bit, Constantine . . . in spite of your beard. [*Then the voice saddens and almost dies away.*] I have.

CONSTANTINE. Only externally, I'm sure.

MRS. MADRAS. Why did you ever marry me? You married me for my money.

CONSTANTINE. [*sighting boredom.*] It is so long ago.

MRS. MADRAS. It seems like yesterday. Didn't you marry me for my money?

CONSTANTINE. Partly, Amelia, partly. Why did you marry me?

MRS. MADRAS. I wanted to. I was a fool.

CONSTANTINE. We are fools, all of us, I suppose, when we grumble at the consequences of getting what we want. [*Evenly still.*] It would have been kinder of me, no doubt, not to have married you. But I was impetuous in those days and of course less experienced. I neither realised that you never could change your idea of what a good husband must be, nor how necessary it would be that you should.

MRS. MADRAS. How dare you make excuses for the way you treated me?

CONSTANTINE. There were two excuses. I was the first. I'm afraid you became the second.

MRS. MADRAS. [*with spirit.*] I only stood up for my rights.

CONSTANTINE. You got them. We separated and there was an end of it.

MRS. MADRAS. I've never been happy since.

CONSTANTINE. That is nothing to be proud of, my dear.

MRS. MADRAS *feels the strangeness between them wearing off.*

MRS. MADRAS. What happened to that woman and her son . . . that Flora ?

CONSTANTINE. The son is an engineer . . . promises very well, his employers tell me. Flora lives at Hitchin . . . quite comfortably, I have reason to believe.

MRS. MADRAS. She was older than me.

CONSTANTINE. Very possibly.

MRS. MADRAS. You've given her money ?

CONSTANTINE. [*his eyebrows up.*] Certainly . . . they were both provided for.

MRS. MADRAS. Don't you expect me to be jealous ?

CONSTANTINE. [*with a sigh.*] Still, Amelia ?

MRS. MADRAS. Do you ever see her now ?

CONSTANTINE. I haven't seen her for years.

MRS. MADRAS. It seems to me she has been just as well treated as I have . . . if not better.

CONSTANTINE. She expected less.

MRS. MADRAS. And what about the others ?

CONSTANTINE. [*his patience giving out.*] No, really . . . it's thirty years ago . . . I cannot fight these battles over again. Please tell me what I can do for you . . . besides taking you back with me.

MRS. MADRAS. [*cowering to the least harshness.*] I didn't mean that. I don't know what made me say it. But it's dreadful seeing you once more and being alone with you.

CONSTANTINE. Now, Amelia, are you going to cry again ?

MRS. MADRAS [*setting her teeth.*] No.

CONSTANTINE. That's right.

MRS. MADRAS *really does pull herself together and becomes intensely reasonable.*

MRS. MADRAS. What I really want you to do, if you please, Constantine, is not to go away. I don't expect us to live together . . . after the way you have behaved it would be wrong of me to consent to such a

thing. But somebody must look after you when you are ill . . . and I don't think you ought to go and die out of your own country.

CONSTANTINE. [*meeting reason with reason.*] My dear . . . I have formed other ties.

MRS. MADRAS. And what do you mean by that?

CONSTANTINE. I am a Mahommedan.

MRS. MADRAS. Nonsense!

CONSTANTINE. Possibly you are not acquainted with the Mahommedan marriage law.

MRS. MADRAS. D'you mean you're not still married to me?

CONSTANTINE. No . . . though it was not considered necessary for me to take that into account in conforming to it . . . I did.

MRS. MADRAS. Well . . . I never thought you could behave any worse! Why weren't you satisfied in making me unhappy? If you've gone and committed blasphemy as well . . . I don't know what's to become of you, Constantine.

CONSTANTINE. Amelia, if I had been a Mahommedan from the beginning you might be living happily with me now.

MRS. MADRAS. How can you say such a horrible thing?

CONSTANTINE. I came from the East.

MRS. MADRAS. You didn't.

CONSTANTINE. Let us be accurate. My grandfather was a Smyrna Jew.

MRS. MADRAS. You never knew him. Your mother brought you up a Baptist.

CONSTANTINE. I was an unworthy Baptist. As a Baptist I owe you apologies for my conduct. What does that excellent creed owe me for the little hells of temptation and shame and remorse that I passed through because of it?

MRS. MADRAS. [*in pathetic wonder.*] Did you, Constantine?

CONSTANTINE. I did.

MRS. MADRAS. You never told me.

CONSTANTINE. [*with manly pride.*] I should think not.

MRS. MADRAS. But I was longing to have you say you were sorry and let me forgive you. Twice and three times I'd have forgiven you . . . and you knew it, Constantine.

CONSTANTINE *recovers his cold sense of humour, which he had almost lost.*

CONSTANTINE. Yes, it wasn't so easy to escape your forgiveness. But for Mahomet, the Prophet of God, Amelia, I should hardly be escaping it now.

PHILIP *comes delicately in.*

PHILIP. I beg pardon . . . only my book. [*Which he takes from the piano.*]

CONSTANTINE. Don't go, Phil.

So PHILIP *joins them, and then, as silence supervenes, says with obvious cheerfulness.*

PHILIP. How are you getting on?

MRS. MADRAS. [*her tongue released.*] Philip, don't be flippant. It's just as your cousin Ernest said. Your father has gone and pretended to marry a lot of wretched women out in that country you showed me on the map, and I don't know what's to be done. My head's going round.

CONSTANTINE. Not a lot, Amelia.

MRS. MADRAS. And if anybody had told me when I was a girl at school and learning about such things in History and Geography that I should ever find myself in such a situation as this, I wouldn't have believed them. [*She piles up the agony.*] Constantine, how are you going to face me hereafter? Have you thought of that? Wasn't our marriage made in Heaven? I must know what is going to happen to us . . . I simply

must. I have always prayed you might come back to me and that I might close your eyes in death. You know I have, Philip, and I've asked you to tell him so. He has no right to go and do such wicked things. You're mine in the sight of God, Constantine, and you can't deny it.

Without warning, CONSTANTINE *loses his temper, jumps up and thunders at her.*

CONSTANTINE. Woman . . . be silent. [*Then, as in shame, he turns his back on her and says in the coldest voice . . .*] Philip, I have things to talk over with you. Suggest to your mother she should leave us alone.

PHILIP. [*protesting against both temper and dignity.*] I shall do nothing of the sort. For the few hours left you in England, and while you're in my house, I'm afraid you must treat my mother with what we call politeness.

MRS. MADRAS. [*with meek satisfaction.*] I'd rather he didn't . . . it's only laughing at me. I'll go to bed. I'd much rather he lost his temper.

She gets up to go. CONSTANTINE'S *bitter voice stops her.*

CONSTANTINE. Phil . . . when you were a child . . . your mother and I once quarrelled in your presence.

PHILIP. [*in bitterness, too.*] I remember.

CONSTANTINE. To this day the thought of it shames me.

MRS. MADRAS. [*quite pleasantly.*] Well . . . I'm sure I don't remember. What about ?

CONSTANTINE. Oh . . . this terrible country ! Every hour I stay in it seems to rob me of some atom of self-respect.

MRS. MADRAS *joins battle again at this.*

MRS. MADRAS. Then why did you come back ? And why haven't you been to see me before . . . or written to me ?

CONSTANTINE. [*in humorous despair.*] Amelia, don't aggravate me any more. Go to bed, if you're going.

MRS. MADRAS. I wish I'd never seen you again.

PHILIP. Good-night, Mother.

PHILIP gets her to the door and kisses her kindly. Then CONSTANTINE *says with all the meaning possible. . . . .*

CONSTANTINE. Good-bye, Amelia.

She turns, the bright light from the hall lamps falling on her, looks at him in half-pathetic triumph, one would say ; for she has at least won more cause of complaint. But she makes no other reply, and PHILIP *comes back to the fire. All this is bitter to him, too. He eyes his father.*

CONSTANTINE. I'm sorry. I'm upset. I was upset when I came.

PHILIP. The visit to Denmark Hill ?

CONSTANTINE. No. I didn't go. I hadn't time. You think I've always treated your mother badly.

PHILIP. Was she ever happy with you ?

CONSTANTINE. [*shrugging.*] For as long as she'd let herself be. And she could have had me back . . . more than once. I was fond of her . . . she was my wife. I've never found it hard to be kind to women. She could have had more children. Tell a woman in the East she might still bear children at forty . . . she'd ask nothing more of you. Rebellion against nature brings no happiness, Phil.

PHILIP. What else is civilisation ?

CONSTANTINE. And what better condemnation of about half of it ?

PHILIP. [*with his ironic smile.*] Well . . . I agree that this present stage of our moral progress is hardly suited to your simplicity of temperament, my dear father. A heart-breaking paradox . . . to find one's

manliest virtues turned to mere weakness under temptation!

CONSTANTINE. You're a queer fellow, Phil. If I'd sat and turned all my vigour into phrases as you do . . . they'd have poisoned me.

PHILIP. That's a home thrust. Thoughts curdling into words . . . and into more thought and more words. Yes . . . it leaves one lifeless.

Exchanging ideas, merely, these two can keep quite friendly, it would seem.

CONSTANTINE. Well . . . you thrust home too. I couldn't get a cab from Blackheath . . . and, vexed and worried as I was, I found I had travelled a station too far in the tube . . . watching such a pretty little trull sitting opposite. She had that curve of the instep and the trick of swinging her foot which somehow I never could resist. And why should a man resist it? But in this civilisation of yours . . half-factory and half-hothouse . . . you're right . . . one's wholesomest instincts turn ridiculous and ignominious. An old age for me here . . . of a loose lip and a furtive eye . . . I'd ask you to shoot me first. Thank God . . . I shake free for ever to-morrow.

PHILIP. [*with a watchful little frown.*] Was it this upset you?

CONSTANTINE. No.

PHILIP. What the deuce were you doing at Blackheath?

CONSTANTINE. I had business there.

PHILIP. [*taking out the letter that came for him by the last post.*] Did Uncle Harry tell you about the Miss Yates affair?

CONSTANTINE. Yes.

PHILIP. I've just had this from Miss Chancellor.

CONSTANTINE. Who's she?

PHILIP. Surely you remember Miss Chancellor . . .

the housekeeper at Peckham? It was she fixed on Brigstock as the other guilty party.

CONSTANTINE. Is he?

PHILIP. Who's to say but Miss Yates? But now Brigstock's solicitors . . . smart expeditious fellows . . . demand an apology and Heaven knows what else! If the whole silly affair does come into Court! . . .

And without apparent warning, though PHILIP'S *smooth implications should have prepared us for it, and though, truly, it is a relief to* CONSTANTINE *to have it out, his magnificent reserve does utterly break down.*

CONSTANTINE. Good God, Phil . . . I've been battling with the little baggage these three hours . . . driving in a taxi round and round . . . I made her come and meet me . . . sitting till we were frozen in some asphalted dust-heap of a park at New Cross! . . .

PHILIP. [*apostrophising all the gods at once.*] I might have guessed . . . I did guess! Oh, you incorrigible old man!

CONSTANTINE. How dared she not tell me about it!

PHILIP. The scandal?

CONSTANTINE. About her baby. She knew . . . before I went to Marienbad.

PHILIP. Well . . . for an appropriate rounding off of your career! I came back in May to find you, didn't I . . . dignified and disdainful . . . in the office at Bond Street? [*Then, as in exasperated bewilderment.*] But why Miss Yates?

CONSTANTINE. Why not? [*At which riposte even* PHILIP'S *jaw must drop.*] You have gathered together in Bond Street, these last three years, let me tell you, Phil, a most inappropriate personnel. These ladies with their social connections ought to be buying clothes there, not selling them. They've the wrong sort of manners too . . . and I should say their morals are doubtful.

That's no matter in their own drawing-rooms. But with all the other young women imitating them . . . powder and paint and affectation . . . jazzing by night and smart chatter by day . . . I shouldn't have known the place. However, it's that American booby's business now. Little Yates seemed the only wholesome self-respecting creature in it.

PHILIP. I see.

CONSTANTINE. [*man of the world, confiding comrade, and model employer once more.*] You'll have to help me, and make her take some money.

PHILIP. She was obstinate about that this morning.

CONSTANTINE. I'd not have believed that any young woman could have vexed me so. I made her every sort of proposal.

PHILIP. [*the ironic smile lighting his face again.*] Even to a place in the household beneath the palm trees?

CONSTANTINE. No.

PHILIP. No, she'd be rather disruptive there.

CONSTANTINE. But of course she had the last word. The child is hers by law . . . and a scandalous law it is! I've had my troubles with women, heaven knows! But nothing like this has ever happened to me before.

PHILIP. [*the smile grows grim but satisfied.*] So . . . it has been left to little Yates to put you in your place!

CONSTANTINE. [*darkly, resentfully.*] It seems funny to you, does it? Well, Phil, I trust no woman may ever make you feel that you've been made a mere convenience of.

JESSICA *returns:* CONSTANTINE *responds at once to the mere feminine presence, is all himself again.*

JESSICA. Am I intruding?

CONSTANTINE. No, no, Jessica . . . no, no.

PHILIP. Mother's gone to bed.

JESSICA. I met her on the stairs. Had she such a very happy talk with you? She actually smiled at me.

Why, she hasn't smiled at me since the morning after Mildred was born.

CONSTANTINE. [*with grandfatherly gallantry.*] How is Mildred ?

JESSICA. Growing by inches.

CONSTANTINE. You must kiss her good-bye for me. Can I have a taxi, Phil ? I've an appointment with Voysey at ten.

PHILIP. There'll be one on the stand opposite. [*He still has* MISS CHANCELLOR'S *letter in his hand.*] What about this ? We don't want the thing in Court, I think.

CONSTANTINE. I should dismiss Baxter.

PHILIP. Brigstock

CONSTANTINE. Whatever his name is.

PHILIP. What has he done to deserve that ?

CONSTANTINE. He seems a poor sort of fellow. Pay him some compensation.

PHILIP. A hundred pounds to invest in some tame-cat business and lose ?

CONSTANTINE. No doubt he will! Give Miss Chancellor the firm's formal thanks for exposing a scandal . . . that'll smooth her down. And of course Miss Yates must go.

JESSICA. [*carelessly curious.*] The girl in your office this morning ?

PHILIP. Yes.

CONSTANTINE. But after a bit you can find her a place in one of these new Madras Houses of State's.

PHILIP. I'm refusing his directorship.

CONSTANTINE. Oh ! Can you afford to ?

JESSICA. He can't.

CONSTANTINE. [*not without malice ; here is the chance of a pin-prick for* PHILIP.] By the way . . . I've to talk to Voysey about my will. You do finally refuse the executorship ?

PHILIP. Please.

CONSTANTINE. And the residue ?

PHILIP. We've as much money now as we can spend without giving thought to it.

CONSTANTINE. You can save.

PHILIP. Mildred's provided for.

JESSICA. She is not, Phil.

PHILIP. I want to leave her till she's thirty with some little inducement towards earning her living.

JESSICA. What nonsense !

PHILIP. Jessica and I quarrel once a week about this school she has been sent to. I spent half a day there. Such a pretty place !

JESSICA. The education's excellent. They learn cooking. Each girl has her garden.

PHILIP. No vegetables allowed in it, I noticed. She'll leave at seventeen, an accomplished young lady . . . able to talk about everything intelligently without knowing anything at all.

JESSICA. Accomplished women do very well for themselves in this world . . . and capable women don't. You're clever enough to see they don't. I want Mildred to be happy.

CONSTANTINE. And he has forbidden me to leave her a ten thousand pound dowry. Did he tell you ?

Aesthetic, fastidious, detached as our charming JESSICA *may be, there are some matters upon which she is common sense itself.*

JESSICA. Philip . . . how dare you do such a thing ?

PHILIP. [*really a little guiltily.*] Well . . . I did mean to tell you.

JESSICA. Yes . . . when your father was safely away.

CONSTANTINE. Don't worry. Even the most ardent social reformers can't prevent people leaving them money. I've told Voysey to make it another five thousand. I very much approve of you, Jessica . . . and I hope dear Mildred will grow to be like you . . .

pretty and witty and pleasantly extravagant. And I'm glad to see Phil so delightfully . . . you'll forgive me the phrase . . . so delightfully henpecked. For a man with his views about women should be. And he's luckier than he knows. I really believe, my dear, that your charm and your art and your sense of beauty . . . your civilisation . . . for so it is . . . all yours, all that's worthy to be called so . . . if I'd been broken to it in my young manhood it might even have conquered me. Good-night . . . good-bye.

JESSICA. Good-bye, Father.

With which gracious peroration CONSTANTINE *turns to the door and* PHILIP *follows him.*

CONSTANTINE. And Philip . . . if you could give that Miss Yates her congé with sufficient brutality she might be stung, perhaps, into taking some compensation. If the auditors wouldn't pass it, I'd send you a cheque . . . as a private matter . . . with pleasure.

PHILIP. [*appreciative, ironic.*] Yes, that's an idea! Victoria at eleven to-morrow? I shall see you off. . . .

They pass out into the hall. After a moment PHILIP *returns, to find* JESSICA *at her piano making a little casual music, soft-sounding passes over the keys.*

JESSICA. I do dislike your father.

PHILIP. That's so much to the good.

JESSICA. But why poor Mildred should be disinherited! I owe you one for that, Phil.

PHILIP. [*his thoughts on the past still.*] Did your parents squabble?

JESSICA. No indeed . . . they so seldom spoke.

PHILIP. [*dismissing them to the past.*] Well . . . if only we cultivate our differences in candour and dignity . . . that may be, after all, the best service one generation does the next.

JESSICA. I'm up to an argument . . . say once a week.

PHILIP. Poor Jessica!

JESSICA. [*speaking as she plays, playing punctuating speech.*] No . . . when you bore me I need only play a little louder. But don't become too much of an intellectual prototype of your dear papa . . . going round . . . seducing all and sundry . . . who've not the brains to resist you . . . to your own peculiar way of thinking. That I should find . . . socially tiresome . . . and rather vulgar of you. Is he, by the way, always so generous with his cheques to young ladies in trouble ?

PHILIP *barks out a contemptuous little laugh*

PHILIP. Vanity ! To think that he couldn't resist dropping you that hint !

JESSICA *turns from her piano, one is sorry to say, quite agreeably amused.*

JESSICA. Has he really been up to mischief again . . . at his age !

PHILIP. If he hadn't been he'd love us to believe it ! Vanity ! His real spur, I do verily believe, to that fine and flamboyantly amorous career ! Nature's energy must be slacking, you'd think, if she can find no other.

JESSICA. [*with fine impatience.*] Let it slack ! The way men allow Nature to befool them into swinging the pendulum . . . they've no other notion . . . between getting babies born and starting wars to destroy the surplus ! Let's have some leisure to enjoy our civilisation.

PHILIP. But you don't. [*Then with a sudden explosive vigour.*] Whitechapel High Street's our civilisation.

JESSICA *is familiarly alert to the challenge. With a good-natured sigh she leaves her piano and, so to speak, daintily doubles her mental fists.*

JESSICA. Ah ! I've never been there.

PHILIP. Seconds out of the ring ! A Manchester cotton mill, then . . . but you've never seen one. The

Potteries . . . the Clyde . . . you've never been there. But the life we live! In this room for instance . . . a Persian carpet on the floor . . . Dutch tiles round the grate . . . and one fine piece of Ming on the mantelpiece. My dear, it's a museum! And I notice your taste in music has slipped back a century lately.

JESSICA. I cannot bear this very modern noise.

PHILIP. Quite so! And Mildred's at that nice old-fashioned school having her mind made a museum lest she should grow into a horrid modern young lady.

JESSICA. Surely you say God forbid to that.

PHILIP. Oh, I'm a fogey! I'm forty-two next birthday. But the music, art, and manners young people batter us with to-day . . . what are they but an echo of the world we made . . . and a right revenge upon us for our blindness to it?

JESSICA. Well . . . are we to move to Manchester?

PHILIP. Don't get desperate! No, as a visionary I'm all for compromise. I'm going in for politics . . . the great art of compromise. Not for high-flying, speech-making politics . . . I'm too apt at speech-making, God forgive me . . . but for sordid, municipal politics, dull hard work over drains and dentistry in the schools and such like.

JESSICA. I've never been against public life for you . . . and I'll economise all that need be . . . but this passion to be on the London County Council is really morbid.

PHILIP. I want Whitechapel High Street made a fit place for Mildred to live in.

JESSICA. Only the people that live in it can make it so. Do they think it ugly?

PHILIP I fear not.

JESSICA. Be careful you don't cease to.

PHILIP. I may cease to . . . I must risk that . . .

I must save my soul alive. I've been a trafficker in beauty . . . I'm sick of it.

JESSICA. That is morbid.

PHILIP. It may be.

JESSICA. Let's go off to Italy for a month.

PHILIP. More art . . . more museums! Oh Jessica, Jessica! When things as they are drive us from sanctuary here . . . run away! I'd have to run very far, now.

JESSICA. I don't need to run. And I'm not responsible for your ugly world. I've one of my own, thank heaven, to live in. You men have your work . . . whatever you choose. But art has to make life possible for some of us women, Phil.

PHILIP. [*savagely almost.*] Give me the art and the artists that'll make most of the life we're content with impossible . . . I've no more use left for the other sort. D'you remember when I was very young and used to salve my social conscience by lecturing on Shelley to select little audiences in the slums?

JESSICA. When we were engaged. And I nearly threw you over for throwing me over one evening for some wretched lecture.

PHILIP. [*his eyebrows up.*] Did you?

JESSICA. [*pleasantly.*] Very nearly.

PHILIP. Fancy that!

JESSICA. I did think marriage would cure you . . but now you lecture me!

PHILIP. Well . . . I remember once travelling in the train with a poor wretch who lived . . . so he told me . . . on what margins of gain he could pick up by standing incompetently somewhere between the cornfield and the baker . . . or the coal mine and the fire . . . or the house and the tenant . . . I forget which. And he was weary and irritable and very unhealthy. And he hated Jones . . . because Jones had just done

him out of a half per cent on two hundred and fifty pounds . . . and if the sum had been bigger he'd have sued him, so he would! And the end of Prometheus was running in my head: This like thy glory, Titan, is to be Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free . . . and I thought him a mean fellow. But on he maundered about his dread of bankruptcy. For his uncle, so it seemed, who had been in the insurance business, had come to the workhouse . . . and what a disgrace that was! And I fear he was a little drunk. He'd have found no comfort in Shelley, I felt sure . . . and, with my lecture worrying me, my own well-springs of charity were dry. But when he asked what was taking me to Canning Town . . . somehow I was ashamed to tell him.

JESSICA. [*not untouched.*] Oh yes . . . it's a horrid world . . . an ugly, stupid, wasteful world.

PHILIP. He cured me, I believe, of lecturing on Shelley . . . which was a pity, in a way, for the lectures weren't so bad. But what is more, I've remembered that little swine through all these years with a sort of baulked affection. I would like to know how he is getting on.

JESSICA. You may meet him County Councilling.

PHILIP. Wangling some shifty contract. By Jove, I'll see he doesn't!

By now they are seated, one each side of the fire.

JESSICA. Don't turn your new leaf till after to-morrow, by the way. Take me to that concert. Tommy has chucked.

PHILIP. Tommy! That reminds me. Two words with you about Tommy. Is your sense of humour working? Tommy wants me to play the Turk and turn him out of the house before he finds himself fatally in love with you.

JESSICA, *in every sense of the phrase, sits up.*

JESSICA. What on earth do you mean?

PHILIP. That was the gist of a lunch-time talk to-day . . . across the roast beef and the roly-poly. Your coming to Peckham precipitated it.

JESSICA. [*ominously.*] Are you serious, Phil?

PHILIP. Tommy was portentously serious.

JESSICA. How dared you discuss me . . . like that?

PHILIP. [*deliberately at ease.*] I didn't . . . he got no change from me. No nice husband discusses his wife. Upon sound Mahommedan principles, he guards her in the harem of his heart. At worst you may catch him saying: Women, my boy, oh, I tell you . . . ! And embedded in the nonsense that follows will be. . . .

JESSICA. Stop trifling, Phil.

PHILIP. Well . . . I listened sympathetically. What else could I do?

JESSICA. You could have knocked him down.

PHILIP. Don't be histrionic, Jessica. He wants me to play the Turk. You fancy me as the noble savage. I couldn't have knocked him down . . . he'd have knocked me down. Then, if you hadn't despised me and flung yourself into his arms you'd have been no true woman.

JESSICA. You won't make me laugh.

PHILIP. What do you bet? And would it have solved the difficulty?

JESSICA. I'll solve that. This is all true, is it? Then I'll not have him inside my doors again nor speak to him again as long as I live. Nor to you . . . till you apologise. Good-night.

And off she is going with extreme and icy dignity when his level voice stays her . . . not quite unwillingly.

PHILIP. My dear . . . flourishes apart . . . you are angry?

JESSICA. Much more than angry.

PHILIP. Hurt?

JESSICA. I should hope so.

PHILIP. [*gently, reflectively; the soft answer that may turn away half-satisfied wrath.*] Tommy's a bit of a fool . . . but I'm fond of him . . . and I hoped you were. I don't want you to part us . . . for your own sake also. I do sympathise with him . . . just a bit.

JESSICA. [*her exasperation wholesomely set free.*] Do you think, may I ask . . . and does he . . . that I've been falling in love with him?

PHILIP. [*judiciously.*] No. So I sympathise with him the more.

JESSICA. [*with tart response for this compliment.*] Thank you. That I've led him on?

PHILIP. [*still more judiciously.*] We now come to the making of very fine distinctions.

JESSICA. Oh, I despise men! I grew up despising them. You took me in for a bit. But I come back to despising you all.

PHILIP. [*a grim twist to his voice.*] And you take good care to keep us contemptible, don't you?

JESSICA. How, pray?

PHILIP. I'm the child of a loveless marriage. I grew up disposed to dislike . . . and that's harder to cure than despising: despising will cure itself! . . . most men and all women. Thank heaven I managed to fall in love with you . . . and no questions asked. But I'm a cold-hearted brute. Tommy, now, is a simple sort . . . and what my entertaining friend Mr. State calls the Mean Sensual Man. . . .

JESSICA. [*finely contemptuous.*] Yes! When we're alone, having an interesting talk, he's all the time thinking I want him to kiss me. Am I that sort of a woman? Answer me.

PHILIP. [*a smile flickering.*] Well . . . let me think. No, not quite. What you want is to have him wanting to kiss you but never to kiss you.

JESSICA. I do not.

PHILIP. I must take your word for it.

JESSICA. Can I help his wanting to kiss me ?

PHILIP. I wonder, now, if you couldn't.

JESSICA. I'm a flirt, am I ?

PHILIP. I believe that's what they are called.

JESSICA, *in the small breathing space after this pretty and swift exchange, shifts her ground.*

JESSICA. I give you my word that I've never flirted with Tommy. He's not the sort of man I could flirt with. And he's always talking of his children . . . and he takes me to help choose a hat for his wife ! And I like Mrs. Tommy . . . though, of course, she's a goose and she doesn't make him any brighter. Heavens, I'd have to be pretty bored before I'd start flirting with him. But he has been boring me lately . . . and I suppose I've been trying to wake him up a little . . . I should never have called it flirting ! If a man can't stand against the simplest sort of temptation, what is he worth ? And how caddish to go talking to you about it !

PHILIP. So he said . . . so he said !

JESSICA. [*in almost pitiful protest.*] All my life I've wanted . . . and I've tried . . . to be friends with men . . . just friends. And one after the other they start flirting with me ! Why ?

PHILIP. [*the smile flickering again.*] I've forgotten, of course, what you look like and I never notice what you have on . . . but I suspect it's because you're rather pretty and attractive.

JESSICA. And am I not to be ? Am I to let you choose my hats ?

PHILIP. [*whimsically.*] As a man-milliner, I might !

JESSICA. Am I to dress like those six thin girls of your uncle's ? . . . though, goodness knows, poor dears, it makes little difference how you dress them !

PHILIP. No . . . I fear they don't profit the world.

JESSICA. [*with most genuine impatience.*] Oh, don't talk about our profiting the world . . . as if we were so many cattle.

The argument ceasing to be so very personal, PHILIP *turns contemplative.*

PHILIP. For this past thirty-six hours . . . now I come to consider . . . I have been perambulating the Woman Question. From the dowdy virginity of Denmark Hill I passed to Peckham and Miss Yates. . . .

JESSICA. Those two wrongs don't make a right!

PHILIP. They must serve to . . . somehow. I wish you could have heard the far-flung nonsense of our business talk in Bond Street to-day.

JESSICA. You men parade in words just as fantastically as we do in our fashions.

PHILIP. [*pleased at her happy hit.*] That's not untrue. Anything to colour the dull work-a-day! And here I am now at my own fireside . . . and at the heart of the problem, Jessica.

JESSICA *turns whimsical now, and oh, so charming.*

JESSICA. Sorry, I'm sure, if I don't suit! Oh, why don't you flirt with me, Phil?

PHILIP. [*won to a quite brotherly good-humour.*] I know . . . I know! Such a silly needless choice it seems to have to be making . . . poor you! . . . between me and my father. But that's more or less what it comes to, my dear.

JESSICA. [*very genuinely indeed.*] I detest and despise your father and all he stands for. But I did think that dear old blunt-headed Tommy was safe.

PHILIP *turns on the charmer, and hits out none the less hard because he hits good-humouredly.*

PHILIP. You unprincipled woman!

JESSICA. [*genuinely amazed.*] I? I've not done a thing . . . that matters.

PHILIP. Quite so.

But JESSICA'S *wits are about her.*

JESSICA. Now don't let's be subtle and logical . . . that leads to trouble. By nature, perhaps, I'm not so very much nicer than some of you men. Mother tells me to this day that I was a glutton of a baby . . . thank God I grew up fastidious. My art and my culture, then, that you mock at, may have their uses, to start with, for me.

PHILIP. [*giving her, of set purpose, the rough side of his tongue.*] My good girl . . . if it's only your culture keeps you from kissing Tommy . . . and Dick and Harry . . . kiss them and have done.

JESSICA *is really shocked.*

JESSICA. Philip . . . how you can say such a brutal and disgusting thing to your own wife, I do not know.

PHILIP. But you do know that the Mean Sensual Man really looks on you all as choice morsels . . . with your charm and your pretty clothes and your pretty talk so much sauce to his appetite. Baulk it and he feels he's made a fool of.

JESSICA. [*taking swift advantage.*] So he is . . . and so he should be.

PHILIP. [*honestly a little puzzled.*] You don't feel the whole thing's degrading?

JESSICA. It's he that's degraded. A woman's either virtuous at heart or she isn't.

Poor PHILIP *relaxes with a sigh.*

PHILIP. One thing seems plain . . . the fireside problem doesn't yield to argument.

JESSICA. I'd hoped there couldn't be one . . . as long as I loved you, Phil.

Her sweetness and his love for her, he won't try to resist either.

PHILIP. Do you ?

JESSICA. Deeply.

PHILIP. Come here, then . . . and kiss me.

JESSICA. [*merrily enough.*] Nothing on earth should induce me to. You can come over to me.

PHILIP. I won't. I'll meet you half way.

They meet, he takes her hand. Then she finds he is looking at the fire lost in thought.

JESSICA. And you forget to kiss me !

He kisses her hand, then, and smiles at her, though his eyes look beyond her still.

PHILIP. I have so come to fear the pleasant sounding word.

JESSICA. Even when it's mine ?

PHILIP. Yes. Be a little patient with me, then, my dear, if loving you, which solved the simpler problem, opens a world of others to my restless mind.

JESSICA. [*but as if she loved this strange thing too.*] Restless, ruthless, unsatisfied, mischievous mind ! Well . . after all, Phil, I did make my choice. I like being married to your sort . . . and, at times, when I don't like it, I feel it's very good for me.

PHILIP. [*solidly.*] It is ! And look here . . . don't be hard on old Tommy. He's a child. Let's ask him to dinner Friday . . . and we'll chaff his head off.

JESSICA. [*quite her assured self.*] No. Your pleasant brutalities I may have to endure . . . but I'll tackle Master Tommy in my own ladylike way . . . and heaven help him ! He won't try to flirt with me again.

PHILIP. Then all will be well ! But oh . . . but oh, the farmyard world of sex ! Have we won nothing nobler from the jungle ? Will mankind cease to be if we cease to strut in our finery ?

JESSICA. [*cheerily.*] You have ceased to strut in your finery. I shall strut in mine till it ceases to amuse me.

PHILIP. Till you find something better to do. We await your pleasure.

JESSICA. What do you mean by that?

PHILIP. Here's a whole world that waits to be made both beautiful and fine. We've done our best . . . and our worst. What are you going to do? You've got your freedom. Do you mean to pay the price of it? I love you . . . deeply. And I try to treat you now as I'd treat another man . . . neither better nor worse. What other compliment is there left to pay you? You'd be wise to value it . . . there's no higher code of honour. Our fireside problem is the world's in a sense . . . since male and female created He them, leaving us to do the rest: though men and women have been long enough in the making . . . for we two do sum up most of the differences in life between us. And we don't shirk them. . . .

JESSICA. I do . . . often.

PHILIP. Then don't you dare to.

JESSICA. [*with a little secret sigh.*] I always shall. It's easier for you to face things and not fear if the truth will hurt. You are free. You weren't brought up to think you must be either good or bad . . . and wondering whether you'd turn out pretty or plain. Yes . . . you let me forget I'm a female. And I see your vision, too . . . I think I do . . . when we've been frank and friendly with each other . . . when we feel we want to shake hands. . . . .

PHILIP. Yes, that's the good moment.

JESSICA. But you can't be wise for us.

PHILIP. I know.

JESSICA. I suppose we've still to set ourselves free. [*Then, lest life should seem too tremendous, and too dull, she turns to him with her pretty smile.*] So don't talk too much about things you don't understand.

PHILIP. [*humorously meek.*] I'll try not.

JESSICA. Poor Phil!

She pats his cheek, then kisses it. "Poor Phil" is but pretty irony, of course; such a charming home as he has, such a charming wife! As long as he'll only see his visions in the domestic fire . . . !

THE END

WITHDRAWN FROM STOCK QMUL LIBRARY

Printed in Great Britain by R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, *Edinburgh.*

WESTFIELD COLLEGE LIBRARY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

KR-812-068